



Interface between music and women's health promotion

Interface entre a música e a promoção da saúde da mulher

Interface entre la música y la promoción de la salud de la mujer

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze women's knowledge about the use of music as a health promotion instrument from the perspective of choral singing. **Methods:** This qualitative study was conducted with 13 female members of a choir in a city in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil. Data were collected in September 2018 through a focus group at the choir rehearsal site. Data underwent content analysis and the following thematic categories emerged: choral singing interface between health and music; benefits of choral singing for health promotion. **Results:** Women understand the concept of health and believe that choral singing promotes musical learning and physical, psychological and spiritual health, thereby enabling the awakening of emotions, coexistence, teamwork and expression of faith. **Conclusion:** Music, expressed through choral singing, can contribute with women's quality of life and is an important tool to promote the health of this population group. Choral singing should be instituted in public health facilities in order to contribute to the population's health promotion.

Descriptors: Women's Health; Singing; Quality of life; Health Promotion.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar o conhecimento de mulheres sobre a utilização da música como instrumento de promoção da saúde na perspectiva do canto coral. **Métodos:** Estudo de abordagem qualitativa, realizado com 13 mulheres integrantes de um coral em um município do estado de Santa Catarina, Brasil. A coleta dos dados ocorreu em setembro de 2018, por meio de grupo focal, no local de ensaio do coral. Os dados foram analisados de acordo com a análise de conteúdo, emergindo as categorias temáticas: interface do canto coral entre saúde e música; benefícios do canto coral para a promoção da saúde. **Resultados:** As mulheres compreendem o conceito de saúde, considerando que a prática do canto coral proporciona: aprendizado musical e saúde física, psicológica e espiritual, oportunizando o despertar de emoções, a convivência com outras pessoas, o trabalho em equipe e expressão da fé. **Conclusão:** A música, expressada por meio do canto coral, pode contribuir na qualidade de vida das mulheres, sendo uma importante ferramenta para promover a saúde dessa clientela. Seria oportuno que o canto coral fosse instituído nos serviços públicos de saúde, a fim de contribuir com a promoção da saúde da população.

Descritores: Saúde da Mulher; Canto; Qualidade de Vida; Promoção da Saúde.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar el conocimiento de mujeres sobre la música como instrumento de promoción de la salud en la perspectiva



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Received on: 05/17/2019

Accepted on: 08/29/2019

del canto coral. **Métodos:** Estudio de abordaje cualitativo realizado con 13 mujeres de un coral de un municipio del estado de Santa Catarina, Brasil. La recogida de datos se dio en septiembre de 2018 a través de grupo focal donde se realizaba el ensayo del coral. Se analizaron los datos según el análisis de contenido de los cuales emergieron las categorías temáticas: interface del canto coral entre la salud y la música; los beneficios del canto coral para la promoción de la salud. **Resultados:** Las mujeres entienden el concepto de salud considerando que la práctica del canto coral promueve el aprendizaje musical y la salud física, psicológica y espiritual contribuyendo para el despertar de emociones, la vivencia con otras personas, el trabajo en equipo y la expresión de la fe. **Conclusión:** La música a través del canto coral puede contribuir para la calidad de vida de mujeres y ser una herramienta importante para la promoción de la salud de esas personas. Estaría bien que el canto coral fuera instituido en los servicios públicos de salud para contribuir con la promoción de la salud de la población.

Descriptor: Salud de la Mujer; Canto; Calidad de Vida; Promoción de la Salud.

INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian population is mostly composed of women (51.5%) and they are the ones who attend and use health services the most – either for their own care or as a companion to a family member, friend or the nearest neighbor⁽¹⁾. Women's health has always focused on the biology and anatomy of the female body, which is subjected to special care during the reproductive life and pregnancy and generally left unserved in the other phases of its development⁽²⁾.

Over the years, women have been found to have a longer longevity when compared to men; however, they get sick more easily and frequently, particularly because of overload due to double or triple workdays, conciliation between household chores and child care, and stress and tiredness⁽³⁾.

In order to improve women's living and health conditions, it is necessary to promote the health of these clients. In 2006, the National Health Promotion Policy (*Política Nacional de Promoção da Saúde - PNPS*) was approved with the objective of reducing health inequalities and hence ensuring that the entire population has the opportunity to make choices that will contribute to their quality of life⁽⁴⁾.

The PNPS proposes some strategies for its implementation in the primary health care network in order to achieve its objectives. One of the strategies is focused on the insertion of actions for social communication through innovative activities that make use of cultural language, such as theater, hip hop, music, *Cordel* literature, among other manifestations⁽⁴⁾.

In this regard, music emerges as a strategy to promote population health as this practice has been gradually introduced in the systematization of health care due to its numerous benefits. It is a strategy that provides those involved with moments of comfort, thereby reducing tension and pain and facilitating the communication and relationship between professionals and clients aimed at a more humanized and holistic assistance and care to strengthen affective and social ties and enable moments of leisure and relaxation⁽⁵⁾. Music can be presented and manifested in different ways. One of them is through choral singing, which is performed by a group of people who sing together and distribute their voices to sing a musical melody⁽⁶⁾.

Studies have already highlighted the benefits of music for the well-being of individuals, such as the reduction of stress in drug addicts and current healing methods^(7,8).

This scenario shows the need to think about women's health through singing and the possibility to understand how music can influence this process of health promotion. This study assumes that through the experiences of women inserted in the universe of singing it is possible to indirectly get to know the knowledge and practices of these clients in relation to health promotion.

However, studies on the use of music in the nursing and health promotion fields are scarce, which has encouraged research on the possibilities of music to promote the health of the female population.

The relevance of this study lies in the search for improvements in quality of life and health actions through music, which can be used as a socially supporting element to assist in health promotion. Thus, the question is: what is women's knowledge about the use of music as a health promotion instrument from the perspective of choral singing? To answer this question this study aimed to analyze women's knowledge about the use of music as a health promotion instrument from the perspective of choral singing.

METHODS

This is a qualitative study⁽⁹⁾ in which the focus group (FG) technique will be used as a theoretical framework for data collection^(9,10).

The research involved women members of a choir in Western Santa Catarina, Brazil. Founded in 2002 and featuring an eclectic repertoire, the choir has been conducting weekly rehearsals and presentations in various sectors of society, such as schools, churches, companies and parties in the municipality and region and has become known to the authors for the relevance of their community insertion. In this regard, the researchers searched for the choir conductor to explain the research objective and hence conduct the study.

Currently, the choir has approximately 37 members who participate voluntarily in the activity. Most of them are women (24 women and 13 men). The study included women who regularly attended rehearsals and performances and who had been in the choir for over six months. The participants were spontaneously selected. Women who had been in the choir for less than six months and those who did not attend regularly were excluded. Thus, the research sample included 13 women who were part of the choir. In qualitative studies the question "how many?" seems to be of relatively secondary importance compared to the question "who?", although they devise essential strategies in practice. This is because what is most expressive in intentional samples is not in the final quantity of its elements, but the way the representation of the quality of the information obtained from them is idealized.

Data collection took place in September 2018. Initially, a questionnaire⁽¹²⁾ with closed-ended questions and specific response choices was used so that the respondent could choose one of them. The questionnaire collected information such as age, skin color, religion, marital status and profession. Data were collected through a focus group before the choir rehearsal on a pre-scheduled date at night and at the same place where the rehearsals were performed⁽¹³⁾. Focus groups must be carried out by a moderator who may be the researcher or another professional able to coordinate the group safely. In addition, the presence of an observer is important to record the participants' subjective information on a fieldnote⁽¹³⁾.

The FG was held at a single moment in a room provided by the choir conductor. The researchers arranged the room and the women to form a circle in order to facilitate the observation of the interaction between the participants so that they could take notes of their reactions and meaningful speech.

The moderator and the observer conducted the group⁽¹³⁾ by guiding the moment using themes related to the objectives. To encourage the discussions, the researchers first presented a video showing a choir performance with the purpose of encouraging the participants to expose their knowledge about and experiences in the choir. From then on, the FG was held with the aid of a question guide with open-ended questions about themes regarding the concept of health, the benefits of music and the possibility of choral singing promoting health, which ensured the active participation of all women within approximately one hour. A recorder was used to record the data which were then transcribed and organized for further analysis.

Data were organized and analyzed based on content analysis⁽¹⁴⁾, which groups a set of communication analysis techniques in order to obtain, through systematic methods and the description of message content, the inference of knowledge of the conditions under which such messages are produced/received.

A pre-analysis was performed during the first stage by scanning the collected data and choosing documents for inclusion in the data sample to be submitted to the analytical procedures. The next stage featured the exploration of the material for analysis and the organization of the coding, which occurred at three moments: choice of elements; enumeration and choice of counting rules; and classification and choice of categories⁽¹⁴⁾. Thus, two categories emerged: choral singing interface between health and music; benefits of choral singing for health promotion.

The FG was only held after the signing of the Informed Consent Form. The data were transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the research participants were named after musical instruments.

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards required by the National Health Council, Resolution 466/12, and was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Southern Border (*Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul - UFFS*) under Approval No. 2.717. 236.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The age of the thirteen women interviewed ranged from 23 to 47 years. They were White and mostly Protestant. In all, five were single and eight were married with children. Professions were teacher, saleswoman, manicure, student and homemaker.

The two categories that emerged from the study: choral singing interface between health and music; benefits of choral singing for health promotion will be presented in the next sections.

Choral singing interface between health and music

This category, choral singing interface between health and music, shows that, for the interviewees, having good health is the result of several conditions that allow the individual to have quality of life and, consequently, to be healthy. It is important to note that each one has an individual definition of health that has been built according to what they lived, knew and learned during the stages of life. Thus, they referred to the concept of health as physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being and as something extremely relevant:

"[...] I believe there are several factors, not only physical well-being, but also emotional, psychological and spiritual well-being." (Pandeiro)

"[...] our health is not specifically physical; it is the whole. If I am not emotionally well, I will surely have some physical issue [...]." (Shaker)

"Health is a set of everything we need. If you are spiritually and physically well, you will also be mentally well [...]." (Acoustic Guitar)

"For me, health is the most important thing in the world... Without health we are nothing [...]." (Cavaquinho)

The women's perceptions showed their focus on the concept of health. In order to be healthy it is necessary that people have, in addition to physical and mental well-being, good housing conditions, food, education, work, and access to health and leisure services, aspects that will contribute to promote the health of the human being⁽¹⁵⁾.

In addition to physical and emotional well-being, the women's perceptions in this study also emphasized spiritual health. Spirituality has a great influence on the way individuals face situations that come their way by building self-confidence, firmness, acceptance and adaptation, which will contribute to the quality of life of believers⁽¹⁶⁾.

In this context, one of the strategies to promote health and provide moments of leisure is through music, which, in addition to being a form of art, has benefits such as the expression of feelings, sensations and emotions that help women carry out their daily activities in a positive way with good mood, joy and peace:

"My mood changes completely. When we sing, we become fuller, happier and more cheerful. We feel better. This is health!" (Acoustic Guitar)

"Through music we end up laughing, having fun, and that brings us health [...]." (Flute)

"[...] Music is a form of art that expresses our emotions, so we express what we feel and intensify more according to our emotional state and this gives us health and strength to move on." (Pandeiro)

The participants' statements described above show the relationship between music and health. The participants stated that music can promote health by enabling good humor, fun and the expression of emotions. The fact is that music promotes biopsychosocial and spiritual care and enables the development of people who listen to, sing/play or dance it. In addition, it promotes well-being through the release and expression of feelings and emotions and it can relieve stress, anxiety and feelings of sadness⁽¹⁷⁾.

Thus, music has several benefits as it provides relaxation, distraction, well-being, pleasant memories and comfort in addition to promoting moments of interaction and leisure⁽¹⁸⁾, thus demonstrating the existing interface between music and health. Such experiences reinforce the relationship between music and health promotion through concentration and control of respiratory movements, thus promoting individuals' greater attention, physical and mental relaxation and strengthening health⁽¹⁹⁾. This release of feelings can be accomplished through two main musical style, the sedative and stimulating styles, which were identified in the participants' statements:

"Music has the power to soothe as well as to excite and comfort [...]." (Violin)

"[...] If I listen to a depressing song, if I am not well, I will automatically become more depressed. But I may be in a state of great sadness and listen to something that fills my soul." (Shaker)

Music can make feelings overflow and, by allowing oneself to feel through musicality, it is possible for individuals to show tranquility and feelings of emotional well-being, thus contributing to the promotion of their mental health⁽²⁰⁾. It should be noted that music produces sedative and stimulating effects. The sedative effect is produced by slower sounds with simple harmonies and a soft musical variation that reproduces relaxation, reduces heart rate and blood pressure levels and contribute to the individual's breathing and ventilation. The stimulating style produces the opposite effect, i.e., it increases breathing rate, blood pressure and heart rate^(17,21).

Another fact that should be noted is that the participants also related health to music and highlighted the feelings of happiness and joy that it arouses:

"Music brings joy to my life and it makes me healthy, it makes me happy." (Acoustic Guitar)

"[...] When we listen to a song we like or sing, it brings immediate happiness. I think it also helps to promote our health." (Harp)

Health is related to happiness and joy as it involves people's well-being⁽²²⁾. By awakening happiness music consequently promotes women's health. Therefore, understanding the way these women seek quality of life and try to maintain their health has an influence on the actions and services that should be offered in the context of primary care. In this regard, the use of alternative care strategies, such as the use of music, should be encouraged by all professionals.

Benefits of choral singing for health promotion

This category, benefits of choral singing for health promotion, shows that music, expressed through choral singing, involves everything that refers to a choir or a *cappella* singing, that is, a group of musicians who sing a melody. Additionally, it can transmit emotions to the audience and also to the singers themselves⁽²³⁾ as there is an intense connection between choral singing and well-being, thus promoting the mental health of those who do this kind of activity.

For the women analyzed in this study, being part of the choir goes far beyond simply singing and doing what they like. One of the reasons why women participate in the choir even on rainy or sunny days is the opportunity to express their faith, which favors well-being and motivates them towards a meaningful life. The relationship between music and spirituality was considered something that generates satisfaction and comfort to face difficult situations:

"Through the choir we worship God, rain or shine [...]." (Harp)

"For me, singing is life, it is worshipping God... It is motivation [...]." (Ukulele)

"I like music and I come to rehearse as a way to thank God for everything He does for me and my family [...]." (Trumpet)

Religion and spirituality are constructs that have been increasingly emphasized in health care as they are commonly perceived as a way of giving meaning to life and having hope and being at peace in the midst of its events⁽²⁴⁾.

Music represents more than psychosocial and spiritual support, it arouses strength and courage to transcend the anguish of one's existential condition⁽²⁴⁾. Music will foster certain learning in each individual that can awaken in their being different meanings and worldviews⁽²¹⁾. Moreover, melody, at the spiritual level, plays an important role as it is closely linked to the field of religion, thus providing spiritual comfort⁽¹⁹⁾.

In addition, another relevant factor that makes women participate in the choir is the opportunity to do good to themselves and others by promoting health:

"In the choir, we sing, and the music is very good for me who sings it, but it is also good for those who are listening to it... Music brings health, and this motivates me to participate in the choir." (Cavaquinho)

"I like to sing in the choir because in addition to doing good to me, I am doing good to others too." (Violin)

Music, whether sung or listened to, has benefits for health and can trigger emotions and mobilize complex cognitive processes such as sustained and divided attention, memory, impulse control, planning, execution and control of motor actions, among others⁽²⁵⁾. Through music it is possible to influence both taste in music and its practice and somehow guide choices and decisions about what to do with life. It also helps to develop expectations in relation to others and oneself, thus showing that in addition to doing good to the ones who sing it, music can do good to the ones who listen to it⁽²³⁾.

Choral singing provides learning opportunities and everyone learns something according to the different meanings and worldviews music awakens in their being⁽²⁶⁾:

"Participating in the choir is very important because we learn a lot: we learn how to breathe better, learn different songs, learn a little about musical notes and how they are drawn on the score, and this expands our culture as well. [...]." (Trumpet)

"Everyone should participate in a choir because it is very good... We learn a lot, new songs[...]." (Acoustic Guitar)

Another benefit identified in the women's statements was the use of music as a concentration and breathing tool. It should be noted that, for them, music enables reflection on the lyrics of the songs, thus providing health:

"[...] We also use music as a concentration tool." (Violin)

"[...] we notice the change in breath control here in the choir. We practice breathing and learn to control it, and it improves our health." (Pandeiro)

"Music makes us reflect on life. Many choral lyrics make me think about life and this makes me healthy." (Trumpet)

"Music can make people healthier as they listen to good lyrics in choral songs that bring motivation, faith and hope." (Acoustic Guitar)

The lyrics of the melodies can trigger deep thoughts in those who sing them and in those who listen to them. They can arouse feelings, memories, amusement, relaxation, among other things. These benefits help women to continue to actively participate in choral singing activities, thereby directly promoting their health.

Choral singing also has several physiological benefits for practitioners as it strengthens the vocal tract, cardiorespiratory functions and neurological networks related to stress and the immune system⁽²⁷⁾. Thus, the relaxation caused by music during choral singing is another benefit pointed out by the participants:

"After the choir rehearsal I get more relaxed and feel less tired. I go home at peace, very relaxed." (Trumpet)

"Here in the choir the songs stir some feelings and can make us relax and even change our mindset. It brings us peace [...]." (Violin)

The women also said that choral singing provides them with the opportunity to do something with their family, thus emphasizing the importance of the family in these recreational activities and of community living. In addition, participating in the choir represents overcoming shyness and improving communication, which facilitates the development of important social skills for living in society:

"I came because my husband decided to come to the choir, but then I liked it and stayed here. It is very good and we can participate with the whole family." (Piano)

"I think the choir helped me overcome my shyness... We sing to a lot of people and sometimes I do not even believe I was able to sing to that crowd because I am very shy." (Cavaquinho)

Choral singing has beneficial psychological effects and helps in the socialization of individuals who participate in such practice⁽²⁸⁾. The collective aspect of choral singing enables greater socialization, teamwork, fun, concentration, self-confidence and decreased shyness, thus strengthening the participants' communication and confidence^(29,13).

Music is one of the expressions of greatest significance and scope among the different social groups, and each individual interprets and re-signifies it in a particular way, which broadens their experience and learning⁽³⁰⁾.

Therefore, when addressing music, its use should be allocated in a sense that aims to demonstrate its health benefits. Its cultural reality is inserted in several scenarios in Brazil and in the world because music is a universal language and may interfere in the promotion of health and public health of different peoples. Additionally, it is up to nurses and other health professionals to let go of the biomedical model of care centered on the disease and to turn their eyes to health promotion in the community, seeking to implement innovative strategies such as the use of music through choral singing with a view to contributing to the lives of individuals and groups⁽¹⁹⁾.

Choral singing is a community work that benefits everyone involved, especially women as it contributes to the promotion of their health and the health of their families and community.

A limitation of the present study is the fact that there may be difficulties in the development of music as a care practice in the community due to the lack of skilled professionals who have musical knowledge in the field of health.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The interviewees' statements showed that choral singing brings people closer, which allows them to build friendship relations, human values and interdependent social roles. Therefore, in addition to developing musicality, participation in choral singing also has several benefits for the health of women and many other population groups.

Although they did not previously realize how much music and health were interconnected, all the study participants acknowledged choral singing as a resource to promote their health and the health of others. Thus, it is clear that music is an interesting tool in the pursuit of healthy living in the community.

Given that, it is important for health professionals to set the tone, in an intersectoral way, so that they can make use of music in health care in primary care in order to benefit other population groups in the community and thus also

conduct research and share experiences involving music from the perspective of choral singing, which is a creative and cost-effective way to deliver care.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare there were no conflicts of interest in the development of the research project actions or in the writing of this manuscript.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Jeane Barros de Souza contributed to the study conception and design and to the writing and/or revision of the manuscript. **Emanuelly Luize Martins** and **Tatiana Xirello** contributed to the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data; and to the writing and/or revision of the manuscript. **Ângela Urio** and **Simone dos Santos Pereira Barbosa** contributed to the acquisition of data. **Érica de Brito Pitilin** contributed to the writing and/or revision of the manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the Federal University of Southern Border (*Universidade Federal da Fronteira Sul - UFFS*).

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How to cite: Souza JB, Martins EL, Xirello T, Urio A, Barbosa SSP, Pitilin EB. Interface between music and women's health promotion. Rev Bras Promoç Saúde. 2020;33:9466.
