Musician Mental Health Service Delivery and Impact in the ‘Live Music Capital of the World’

Investigators

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Background

Musicians, particularly popular genre performers, have been shown to be at elevated risk of psychiatric illness and suicide. Studies suggesting a link between creativity and mental illness, along with the widespread stereotype of "the tortured artist," may dissuade emotionally distressed musicians from seeking mental health treatment for fear of losing their musical creativity. Little is known about how beneficial mental health services are perceived by musicians who do seek treatment.

The SIMS Foundation is a unique nonprofit organization in Austin, Texas that for the past 20 years has provided counseling, psychiatric and addiction recovery services to Austin musicians and their families. The SIMS Foundation has a network of approximately 70 mental health providers and provides services to over 600 musicians and family members annually.

Presenters will cover the evidence for gaps in mental health services for musician populations which led to the mission and vision of the SIMS Foundation, as well as prior research on the connection between musicians and mental illness, stigma of treatment-seeking, and the link between stress and mental illness symptoms.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate musicians' satisfaction with, and perceived benefit from, counseling, psychiatric medication management and/or addiction recovery services.

Methods

An online client satisfaction survey was sent to all musicians and their family members actively enrolled in the SIMS Foundation as of June, 2015 (n=628). Questions targeting type and affordability of services accessed, satisfaction with providers, as well as experiences with
insurance systems and the affordable care program enrollment, when applicable, were included. The study was approved by the Seton IRB.

Results from the survey were first grouped into summary tables and tests for differences across demographics and type of service received were performed using t-tests or Wilcoxon ranksum testing as appropriate for age and chi-squared tests for categorical and dichotomous measures. Summary tables and all analysis were performed using STATA version 13.1 (College Station, TX).

**Results**

262 individuals responded to the survey, for a response rate of 41.4%. Of these, 94% of respondents were musicians (n=244), 5% were family members of musicians, and less than 1% had other roles related to musical performances. A majority of the musician respondents were male (60%) and white (79%). 87% were receiving counseling, 32% psychiatric medication management and 8% addiction recovery services. 89% percent of musician respondents (196/220) rated their counselor as "very good" or "excellent"; 79% of respondents (71/90) rated their psychiatric providers and 90% (26/29) rated their addiction recovery specialists in this range. 86% of musicians receiving counseling, 75% receiving psychiatric medication management, and 52% receiving addiction recovery services either agreed or strongly agreed their symptoms and overall functioning improved as a result of treatment. 99% of musicians said they would refer a friend to the service.

Several interesting relationships were identified in the baseline sample of client-respondents. For example: males were more likely to be in older age categories, less likely to use any insurance for services in the prior year, and less likely to be enrolled in the program as a spouse of a musician. These demographics also proved to have statistical dependence with a variety of service use-type and patterns for ratings of services. In this sample, females were more likely to use counseling services while males were more likely to be in psychiatric medication management care. Those same psychiatric services received lower ratings for clients in younger age categories. Additionally, both psychiatric medication and addiction services were more likely to receive higher ratings from males receiving those services.

**Conclusions and Practical Relevance**

The results of this study demonstrate that popular musicians can and do benefit significantly from mental health interventions, contrary to widely held misconceptions. Dissemination of these findings may encourage others in this high risk, underserved population to seek appropriate mental health treatment. This snapshot of attitudes from this patient population toward the services they are receiving is beneficial to better understanding the delivery of those services. It also offers some insights into the way that different demographic groups use
and view the services they receive, which may help to tailor and adapt service interventions supported by this foundation in the future.

This research is also moving forward with a second survey study examining musician lifestyle-specific sources of stress, financial stress and mental health scales of depression, anxiety, and alcohol abuse. The theoretical framework, methods, and progress of this study will also be presented as a natural follow up to the current study.