Assessing the Social Effect of Therapeutic Recreation Summer Camp for Adolescents with Chronic Illness

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The Social Effect of Summer Camp

Summary

The article I chose to review assesses the social effects of therapeutic recreation summer camps in the lives of adolescents with chronic illnesses. Chronic illness, as defined by the text, is a term given to health conditions that persist for longer than three months and will often continue throughout a person’s lifetime. Because of the doctor’s visits, treatments, and hospital stays that adolescents with a chronic illness deal with, their exposure to social situations is limited and may stunt and negatively affect social growth and development. Many adolescents with a chronic illness feel they do not have the ability to develop meaningful social relationships, create new friendships, and excel in different social situations, which can lead the adolescents to feel a lower sense of self-efficacy.

Research indicates that both therapeutic recreation (TR) and summer camps are effective sources for increasing social self-efficacy for adolescents with chronic illnesses. TR has been identified as the main modality in decreasing depression and increasing self-efficacy in adolescents due to successful execution of the TR process: assessment, plan, implementation, and evaluation. Though both TR camps and summer camps improved self-efficacy, no research determined whether combining the two would further increase self-efficacy. Thus, a study was organized that would split campers into two groups: one group would participate in a regular summer camp program and the other would participate in a TR camp program, followed by a second week combined together in a regular summer program. This study tests two hypotheses: 1) Summer camps using TR programming would be more effective in increasing social self-efficacy than summer camp programs not using TR, and 2) participants in the TR based summer camp session would exhibit a greater increase in social performance with peers over the
traditional summer camp session. The results of the study did not show a significant difference between the self-efficacy improvement of each camp in adolescents with chronic illnesses, contrary to the first hypothesis; however, participants of the TR based camp did exhibit greater increases in social performance with peers over those in the traditional camp session, this support the second hypothesis.

**Strengths**

The authors of this paper did an incredible job in providing the reader with any and all background information that might be necessary to understand the content of the article. By clearly defining chronic illnesses and the specific negative effects they can have on adolescents, as well as highlighting the importance of social self-efficacy, they leave no room for confusion and force the reader to recognize the relevance and importance of the issue being discussed. Another strength of the article is that the TR process and methods that were implemented in the camps were listed and explained. Not everyone who reads this article may be familiar with the process model, so the authors lay out the elements of this model: assessment, plan, implementation, and evaluation. Information was provided explaining how and when data was measured, and how the data was interpreted to results, laying out the evidence that shows the credibility of the article.

**Weaknesses**

Though the article discusses an important and interesting topic, the paper is written in a scientific manner that might be difficult to read for people who don’t read many research papers. The authors could have edited the writing style of the article slightly to allow it to appeal to a greater audience. The article also spent so much time providing background information regarding the need for this study and describing the methods implemented in this study that there
was a lack of development and explanation of the conclusions. The delivery of the results of this study was cut short and the significance of the results of this student was not discussed. Though the relevance of carrying out a study on this subject were clearly highlighted, the “so what?” question is left unanswered at the conclusion of the article.

**Article Application**

This article reinforces the benefits of summer camps as a whole for people with chronic illnesses and highlights the success of TR methods. Both summer camp methods were proven to be successful in helping adolescents improve self-efficacy, which could be vital information for parents looking to improve the quality of life of their child who has a chronic illness. We also learn that the TR process model is more successful in helping these adolescents interact with their peers and be more outgoing and create meaningful relationships in social settings. This study provides support for the authenticity and importance of the field of TR and shows those who might doubt that research and data prove the TR method to be one of the best options for improving quality of life for adolescents.

**Personal Reaction**

I found the article very interesting and relevant because I hope to work at a summer camp as a TRS. This article, as previously stated, gives credibility to and highlights the importance of individuals who will run these kinds of camps and programs to help improve the lives of adolescents. I loved all of the scientific data and research to support the hypotheses of this study because it helps me to feel justified in my career of choice. I felt the article was very well-written, captivating, and written about a topic that doesn’t receive as much attention and publicity as it deserves.
References