

**Music and Prison: What Impact Do the Music Programs Have on the Behavior and  
Inmates in Prison When They Have Access to It?**

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### **Abstract**

This Project focuses on the influence and behavioral change that music and music rehabilitation programs can bring to prisoners. The Project focuses in its first part on developing and showing the influence that arts, such as music, have on us as individuals in aspects such as our behavior, way of being, and feelings. Throughout the research, the Project focuses on developing the idea that music rehabilitation programs should be used in prisons due to their high rate of improvement in people with mental illnesses and more mental illnesses such as prisoners, also focusing on the benefits that these programs cause to prisoners and how they can change the lifestyle of these people due to these programs.

*Keywords:* Music therapy, rehabilitation, musical influence, behavior, behavior, emotions

## **Music and Prison: What Impact Do the Music Programs Have on the Behavior and Inmates in Prison When They Have Access to It?**

Over time, several ways have been sought to try to control violent situations in prisons using different methods of torture, turning these types of places into areas where human rights are not entirely respectable. The people most harmed by such acts are the prisoners who already have a high probability of having a deific life before arriving at the prison. This and the null creation of social relations inside the prisons, make these a hazardous place for the mental health of someone and very harmful when seeking rehabilitation of a prisoner if that is what you are looking for; the lack of comfort and the hostile environment that generally make this kind of places very unlikely for a healthy rehabilitation.

This is where music comes in. Music is a universal art that unites all human beings because who doesn't like to listen to music? It is something so versatile that we can all seek refuge in this artistic medium since the influence it has on people is so great that it can affect our way of being, behavior, and even emotions. We will investigate the type of impact that music can have on prisoners and whether musical rehabilitation programs should be introduced in prisons to see changes in the attitudes of prisoners, thus improving the social environment that is constantly lived in prisons.

### **Influence of Music on Human Behavior**

Over the years, human behavior has been the subject of several studies to understand their motivations and reactions to specific situations; a pervasive issue to understand and explain. Throughout a person's life, they will be subject to various experiences and occurrences that influence their behavior or way of being. It is no mystery to anyone that music significantly affects our development and behavior. "Musical preference is shaped during adolescence as it helps adolescents form relationships and explore their identity through music. This strongly

influences musical preference throughout one's life" (Yhap, 2019, p. 12). Throughout our life is an art that will always be ingrained in people and something that we as humans make our own. This is what I mean by something unique to people as individuals since musical taste is unique and different for any person as well as the influences that this can generate in individuals.

At the time of this research, it was found that several data and information confirming the various influences music can generate in a human being. One is the emotional and psychological influence on a person to improve multiple aspects of difficult situations. "Music has power over our feelings. No other species has evolved in such a way to ascribe meaning and create emotional responses to music as humans" (Avramova, 2019). And is that the cognitive responses that our brain makes concerning music affect both our actions and emotions we see this reflected in the study by Silverman (2011) where he notes that music therapy is quite effective for the mental health of many people developing positive skills to deal with situations of anxiety and depression (p. 11).

These behaviors are not with a specific study group, something natural that can affect people in different situations of life, as mentioned by Bensimon et al. (2015) in their study on *The Impact of Relaxing Music on Prisoners* where they state:

"Music has been consistently found to reduce agitation, anxiety, anger, negative thoughts, and aggression among various populations such as students; demented patients; forensic psychiatry patients; preadolescents with emotional, learning, and behavioral disorders; and hospitalized patients" (pp. 3-4).

That shows the considerable influence that music has on society and how much control and influence it can have on individuals.

Finally, it has also been discovered that music has physiological influences on people, anchored to its mental impact. "Discussed in terms of its ability to influence one's mood, music has been found to represent/convey emotions and generate physiological responses" (Yhap, 2019, p. 6). This information indicates that it can generate attitudes or internal body changes such as sweating, pain, or the opposite rise of emotions.

Although see all these improvements, there is a specific type of music for these "positive" changes, and it is relaxing music, several studies such as the one by Labbe et al. (2007) found that listening to relaxing music reduced state anxiety and state anger among college students after exposure to a stressor. Other studies found similar effects in clinical and elderly populations with behavioral or cognitive disorders" (p. 4), and it has been proven that relaxing music causes these changes in the person's attitude and positively influences times of stress. This information can be corroborated by Bensimon et al. (2015) since, according to their study, they state that different types of music have different effects on people. If the aim is to relieve anxiety and reduce anger, "relaxation music" should be used: "Such music is characterized by steady, slow, repetitive, and flowing rhythms at a pace that is similar to the heart rate of a relaxed person (60 to 80 beats per minute)" (p. 4). It consists predominantly of low tones and is not perceived as loud," confirming the positive influence relaxing music has on people and how good the inclusion of therapy with this type of music can be for people.

### **Prisoner Behavior With and Without Music**

Prison can be a very harmful environment for prisoners and can cause various traumas and misbehaviors within the prison; it is also no secret that in many cases the prisoners already had a bad experience with life living in poverty or other irregularities that led them to commit such actions for which they ended up in prison. Many of these prisoners indeed already had a

dark past and a miserable life, combining this with the dizzying and traumatic environment that a prison can be. Many of the behaviors that the prisoners can have will undoubtedly be very irregular and lead them to commit various acts of bad taste and irresponsibility that put them in dangerous situations of violence.

The study by Bensimon et al. (2015) pointed out that prison is a very traumatizing and painful place for its inmates and that this physical and social environment has a very close relationship with the high levels of mental and emotional disorders of the prisoners, finding a surprising connection between the environmental conditions of the prison and the dynamic behavior and conduct of the inmates (p. 1). It was also found that "inmates suffer from higher levels of mental and emotional distress (i.e., low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, stress, fear, anxiety, and anger) in comparison with the general population" (2015), thus demonstrating that prison environments are not well designed to maintain the mental health of many prisoners causing severe problems concerning the behaviors and actions they regularly commit in prison.

The bad attitudes in prison are the most common, and the mixture of trauma and bad experiences generates a large percentage of prisoners with mental illness. This behavior is explained very coherently by Stewart (2008) in a study that says that "A high proportion of prisoners have a mental health problem, such as neurotic disorder, personality disorder or psychotic disorder" (p. 4). Additionally, James & Glaze (2006) mention that "The prevalence of mental illness in prisons is at an all-time high, and some research has indicated that over half of all inmates experience some degree of mental illness" This clarifies the picture and gives a deeper explanation of the psychological damage that being in prison can cause to a person.

Already reviewed the reasons why many prisoners throughout their stay in prison tend to have problems when it comes to their behavior and what being in an environment so harmful and

detrimental to mental health, comparing the changes in attitudes that relaxing music can generate in prisoners and how this would work in an environment such as prison. As mentioned at the beginning, this type of music creates positive stimuli in any population, and what better than to cause them in some prisoners who tend to have several mental illnesses due to their stay. Several studies have shown experiments to try to implement music therapy as a type of rehabilitation for prisoners and thus positively improve their behavior.

Music therapy as mentioned has had several positive effects on people with high rates of stress and mental problems as it induces them to a kind of pacific cognitive treatment where relaxation is the most essential thing in their study done on this type of therapy Chen et al. (2014) these clarify that Rigorous outcome studies have shown the effects of music therapy for decreasing symptoms and improving functioning in people with depression; improving mental state, global state, and social functioning in people with schizophrenia, and reducing depressive symptoms in people with substance abuse (p. 2). This information is of great help since a population that can be directly related to these statements. The prisoners that as it was said before have a high range of suffering from this type of disease due to the environment built by a prison, and all the bad that can generate in an individual, so this type of therapy would influence in a positive way to be implemented in a jail.

Another striking impact is that music therapy and music, in general, have given prisoners the capacity to generate good emotions and a feeling of improvement and evolution. This quote can be read in the research done by Pratt (1990), where he indicates that he argues that music can create an "autonomous enclave," a non-physical space that replaces psychological reality and can serve as an imagined "new life" in the existing. This imaginative space allows prisoners physically behind bars to escape mentally and intellectually, fostering hope for a better future

after serving their sentence (p. 2). This kind of thought significantly influences behavioral change as it gives prisoners a moment to see themselves reformed and improved for a second chance at life through the power of music.

With this information, we can find a great way to rehabilitate prisoners because as it was seen music therapy and music, in general, have a powerful influence on prisoners, who as mentioned are very likely to have mental problems; the fact of not only improving their behavior but also of something as important as making the prisoners see themselves improving with this type of therapy as mentioned by Pratt (1990) and giving them the incentive to improve provides us with the certainty that these therapies have a very positive response to people with these characteristics.

### **Music Programs Should Be Used in Prisons as They Help to Improve Prisoners'**

#### **Behavior**

As we have already observed throughout the essay, music therapy can be an excellent influence for the change and rehabilitation of the behavior of prisoners, and as already mentioned, in some cases, music tends to improve the behavior and even the mental health of the person placed in therapy. In many prisons, these programs are still not a priority, they are seen as an ineffective way of rehabilitating people who according to many people cannot change, resulting in it not being a priority or being considered something very irrelevant and even childish since many will think that listening to music can change someone's way of being and attitude just talking about prisoners.

Many people affirm that music can have an influence contrary to what is sought and can be used for torture or as a negative influence on prisoners; Avramova mention this in her article *The dark side of Music: Using Sound in Torture*, where she tells how in some countries this



technique is used to torture prisoners further worsening their attitudes creating an even worse environment than that found in prison, a clear example is when she mentions that "Music can cause pain because of its emotional and psychological functions, greatly affecting our self-identity and emotions, both of which are targeted in torture, explained Grant, adding no particular type or structure of music is more effective for torture" (Avramova, 2019). This kind of statement harms a lot of the good influence that is tried to give with this type of program, damaging even more to the people who themselves are already in a pretty prejudicial environment for them. It is understood that they have to pay for their acts but to use something so beautiful that unites all as the music to harm even more people already significantly damaged is something very inhuman.

The purpose of these music programs should be to help prisoners who are already significantly damaged by society to have an impulse to improve their behavior by employing their emotions, experiences, and good vibes that music can give them, as we can see in the research of Hjørnevik & Waage (2019). The prison as a therapeutic music scene: Exploring musical identities in music therapy and everyday life in a prison setting where it is indicated that in some prisons, there are music rooms for prisoners to find an area that fills them with emotions. Clearly, the music room, as the center for much of the musical activity, represented a multiple and complex musical emotion zone" (p. 6). Many of these programs have extraordinary results, and their positive approach yields very fruitful results for the research.; as mentioned by Ellis (2014) in his research saying, music therapy is a type of non-aggressive therapy that allows patients to positively manage their mental health needs by participating in the musical experiences they prefer (p. 11) and this should be the primary purpose to help prisoners to find themselves and through music and to give themselves a boost in order to get better.

There are also more factors in which music therapy can be very effective for prisoners. We see this in the research done by Bensimon (2023), explaining post-prison rehabilitation through music from the Good Lives, where he mentions that music therapy positively influences four factors in prisoners, which are the improvement of social bonds, the development of interpersonal skills, the non-critical approach to themselves and emotional vasodilation (p. 5). This situation clearly shows how important it is to have this type of therapy in prisons and how to use them in an excellent way to develop a favorable environment for prisoners, improving aspects of their lives to make the whole process they are going through a less stressful and painful way. These therapies give them a personal development of growth and improvement in their lives where they can begin to love themselves trying to cure all those diseases and mental problems that prisons and their not-so-favorable environments cause.

Also, a crucial factor is the feeling these therapies and programs generate in the inmates since it gives them a new air to their lives where they find peace. This attitude can be seen when "According to the participants, participating in the program raised their hopes of fulfilling their dreams for the future. It also instilled in them the drive and aspiration to develop themselves through music" (Bensimon, 2023, p. 8). This type of influence is what matters most and is the main reason to start using these programs in prisons; the peace that these programs can transmit and the creation of feelings and desire to have dreams and improve in life make that these therapies should be used in prisons responsibly and healthily for prisoners.

## **Conclusion**

Music has a very positive impact on the prisoners if used in a safe and responsible way making an influence in a positive way in several interpersonal and social aspects of the people improving considerably their stay in prison, even reaching points where it gives them a feeling of wanting to progress in life and improve as people through social relationships and creating a healthier environment for people in prison. This type of therapy should be used in different jails since as we saw in many cases the result is quite positive even helping in a psychological way to the people in prison access to this type of therapy. It should be mandatory since it gives the feeling of improvement among the inmates and motivates them to get ahead. The impact is very positive and the influence that music has on them is very big, the behavioral changes are evident and as mentioned this would clearly help to improve the social environments of the prison. It gives the place more of a rehabilitation and improvement of change that depressing and horrific perspective that society has on them, music has an undeniable impact in our community and what better than to use it for people who need it to improve and live in a happier and more harmonious world.

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