

Drumming & Science

Immune and affect response to shamanic drumming

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Abstract

The effect of shamanic drumming and journeying on immune response and a variety of dimensions of affect (anxiety, well-being, and mood disturbance, and their subscales) was assessed with several questionnaires and assays of Salivary Immunoglobulin A (S-IgA) from a sample of 40 shamanic practitioners who acted as their own controls in a repeated measures design with four conditions--Baseline, Resting, Birdsongs, and Journeying/Drumming. Results of this study suggest that although shamanic journeying accompanied by drumming appears to have a significant effect on affect, it does not have an effect on immune response as indicated by S-IgA levels. All the well-being factors increased in the Drumming/Journeying Condition compared to the Birdsongs Condition. Total, Physical, and Affective Well-Being increased in the Drumming/Journeying Condition compared to Baseline. Only Physical Well-Being was greater in the comparison of the Drumming/Journeying Condition to the Resting Condition. This suggests that Drumming/Journeying increases well-being across several dimensions. Lower anxiety was found in response to the Drumming/Journeying Condition than in response to Baseline, Resting, and Birdsongs conditions, supporting the hypothesis that shamanic drumming/journeying effectively reduces anxiety. All mood disturbance subscales (Anger, Confusion, Depression, Fatigue, Tension-Anxiety) except Vigor had lower levels after the Drumming/Journeying Condition than at Baseline. Tension-anxiety, anger, confusion and fatigue were lower for the Drumming/Journeying Condition than after the Birdsongs Condition, while vigor was significantly higher for the Drumming/Journeying Condition. Depression and confusion levels were lower after the Drumming/Journeying Condition than after the Resting Condition. The results of the present investigation revealed that, for the participants in this project, shamanic journeying accompanied by drumming was helpful, not harmful, over a range of psychological dimensions. While it appears unlikely to increase S-IgA concentration, the domain of immune response to shamanic journeying/drumming should not be closed off prematurely. Other studies have suggested a link of positive psychological factors to increased immune response. Shamanic journeying accompanied by drumming appears to be a robust means for effecting significant positive changes in some affective domains.

Subject Area

Psychotherapy|Immunology|Cultural anthropology|Physiological psychology

Recommended Citation

Harner, Sandra Dickey, "Immune and affect response to shamanic drumming" (1995). *ETD Collection for Fordham University*. AAI9520609.

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