A REVIEW OF META-ANALYSIS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVENTURE THERAPY ON BEHAVIORAL ADOLESCENTS

Timothy, J. Turner
University of Chichester, UK.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence as explained by Santrock (1998) is a period of transition in which physical, emotional, and cognitive changes spark challenges and growth. Research states that it is hard to explain why adolescence seek risk taking experiences. Adolescence have the ability to perceive risk appropriately however there ability to weigh the risks they participate in is where the problem lies (Greene, 2000). Using adventure therapy for potential health benefits is crucial across the world including the UK. Research findings have explained that 10% of children under 16 years of age in the UK are reported to have such conditions.

There is a great amount of research into the term ‘adventure therapy’ all of which find it difficult to define. Based on these reports and more importantly that of Kutz & O’Connel (2007) who have recently stated that the wilderness adventure field was lacking a standard definition. The Bureau of land management (BLM, 2008) has defined as is “programs intervention to provide a less restrictive intervention or incarceration or hospitalisation for youth who may require intervention to address emotional or behavioural challenges. Through these experiences, Wilderness adventure therapy programmes seek to improve the participants; interpersonal skills, groups skills, sense of trust, self confidence, self esteem, physical abilities/fitness and awareness of the natural world (Moote & Wodorski, 1997).

Outdoor and adventure therapy is rapidly growing with the amount of available literature ever increasing, however there is little in the way of reviewing that literature on its effectiveness. Adventure programmes with juvenile offenders and mental health clients possess a relatively long history in treatment of these youths (Gass, 1993; Gillis & Gass, 2003; Kelly & Baer, 1971) however, the adventure therapy field has very few controlled quantitative studies regarding its effectiveness with clients. This report will begin to assess the effectiveness of research reports by gathering research from previous meta analytic studies and come to some conclusion towards the findings.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Whilst reviewing literature it is present there are many forms of adventure therapy and analysing these results has been very difficult for a number of reasons. One of which is mentioned previously that the term adventure therapy is very broad and has no agreed definition. Therefore when it comes to reviewing such literature is it difficult to bring together those of a similar findings. Priest, Gass and Gillis (2000, 2003) present a paradigm to help those differentiate between literature;
- those who focus on changing clients feelings
- those who focus on clients thinking as well as there feelings
- those who focus on clients feelings, thinking and social behaviours.

(Adapted from Priest, Gass and Gillis, 2000, 2003)

Research findings undertaken have also mentioned the difficulty to review literature on the effectiveness of adventure therapy because of the myriad methods used within each study. Many of which present a differ in either; location, task/activity or qualifications of teachers/instruction. All of which would have a significant difference on outcomes. Again Gass (1993) described three settings where A) adventure-based therapy done primarily on challenge (ropes) courses and through group development. B) wilderness adventure therapy in a wilderness setting. C) outdoor therapeutic program through residential camping.

Due to the variety of different journal reports around and the difficulty of bringing such data together and formulating valued results the research is very limited however very important for the future development of adventure therapy. The few meta-analysis into the effectiveness of adventure based therapy is important so mental health counsellors can begin to review what kind of adventure based therapy are best supported. The common way used in the results below of representing findings of research is through gathering similar quantitative data and finding out standard deviations for appropriate outcomes.

RESULTS

The results present are a review of different meta analysis all of which have looked at a number of different journals into adventure/wilderness therapy. A meta analysis is a statistical technique for accumulating and representing research results in various studies (Neil, 2002, 2008). Table I has been adapted from Meta-analytic research on the outcomes of outdoor education. (Neil, 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>N Studies</th>
<th>N Effects</th>
<th>N Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cason &amp; Gillis (1994)</td>
<td>Adventure programming for adolescents</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>2,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaste et al. (1997)</td>
<td>Adventure education and Outward Bound programs</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1,728</td>
<td>12,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marach, P. E. (1990)</td>
<td>Camping programs</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow (1990)</td>
<td>Adventure programming</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>1,362</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson &amp; Lipsky (2000)</td>
<td>Wilderness challenge programs for delinquent youth</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burton &amp; Dorin (2000)</td>
<td>Ropes challenge courses</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedard et al. (2002)</td>
<td>Wilderness therapy programs for delinquent youth</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillis &amp; Speasman (2002)</td>
<td>Ropes challenge courses</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>2,790</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results present analyse a total of 295 case studies including over 21,000 participants. The results show a significant effect of adventure therapy within its participants. Cason & Gillis (1994) used a meta analysis of 43 studies with a total sample of 2,291 participants finding that adventure therapy programs contribute to improved self concept, decreased behavioural problems, increased internal locus of control, and improved clinical function. Wilson & Lipsky (2000) conducted a meta analysis of 28 outcomes studies where they incorporated multiple regression with the programmes duration program intensity, and therapy as being predictors of delinquency and antisocial behaviour. came to the conclusion that the positive results were significantly higher when the program’s incorporated counselling. Bedard et al (2003) study focused on behaviour change and interpersonal skills. Finding 8 studies found an effect size of .50. Self esteem and self concept gave the largest effect score of .54 through 16 studies.

CONCLUSION

Adventure therapy has supporting evidence from the data found in this report and that of many meta analysis written in previous literature. All of which give sound results that adventure therapy is effective in achieving its outcomes. A mean effect size of .36 from results in table 1 support the claim of a significant impact. The reporting of effect sizes has utility beyond meta-analysis. Reporting of effect sizes is now considered a standard part of empirical reporting (American Psychological Association, 2001). Effect sizes allow for comparative quantification of program effectiveness. Although the meta analysis provides empirical evidence of its effectiveness it does not solve the question of what specific areas within the adventure therapy field are most important or how effective they are on a long term basis.

Through a great amount of research it is clear to see that the field of adventure therapy is very vast. However there are common themes arises from all research which need to be addressed if it is going to advance. First of all revised definitions of adventure therapy has to be agreed so literature and research can be confined to a specific field.

Once agreed research can be broken down and analysed so variables are better controlled and outcomes for all can be specific to make research more accurate on its effectiveness.

REFERENCES


