



I have decided to publish an abridged version of my findings.  
If you wish to read my full research paper, please contact  
[jane@tayloromadetherapy.co.uk](mailto:jane@tayloromadetherapy.co.uk)

I undertook a Research Project as part of my counselling course. *'To discover the general awareness of the use of drumming (sound therapy) and the perceived benefits on wellbeing when used as part of healing therapy in a counselling practice'*

***"We moderns are the last people on the planet to uncover what older cultures have known for thousands of years: The act of drumming contains a therapeutic potential to relax the tense, energize the tired, and soothe the emotionally wounded"***

*~ Garry Diggins Ontario Sound Therapist*

### **Personal interest**

I only need to hear a drum and I get goose bumps..... I have a particularly lovely drum called an ocean drum, when it arrived the guy delivering, said 'I kept hearing the sound of the sea in the back of the van'; I asked after his wellbeing, was he chilled out? he laughed good naturedly. Before I had even unwrapped it, my husband was moving the box around and said 'Oh wow, that sounds just like the waves'.

I have attended several Shamanic Soul Retrieval workshops and retreats as well as group drum circles. When I have a gong bath, there is also usually a drum involved at the beginning and towards the end. This enables me to go into an altered state of consciousness like meditation or hypnotherapy. I find that my chronic pain is lessened, I feel emotionally upbeat and lifted; I call it my 'drumming high'.

"There is no more obvious evidence of connection between our heart and energy outside the body than our heart's response to musical rhythms.....Our heart is the metronome of our body's biorhythm, and health happens when we are in rhythm within ourselves, synchronized with other living systems and moving to our pre-set beat rather than trying to respond to the driving beat of the stressful outside world....Healing, then, becomes the ability of our heart to improvise and develop its own new rhythms to the chaotic rhythms that continually emerge in our daily life."

*~ Paul Pearsall*

cited in <http://alternativeculture.com/music/heartbeat.htm>

To use the analysis of reports on the effects of group drumming interventions on anxiety, depression, social resilience and inflammatory immune response amongst mental health service users. Researched in 2015 and published in 2016, as the basis to start my research and as secondary background knowledge on which I based my project. This enable me to word my questions to be able to collate the information I needed.

Having read the main research article and others relating to drum therapy, I decided to produce my own survey using Survey monkey to discover how many people may or may not be aware of drum therapy and its benefits. My survey was sent out to my peer group, other groups in training, supervisors, qualified counsellors, sound practitioners and other therapists. I decided to share it with followers of my blog, friends and family. This would give me a good cross section of responses.

### **Secondary Research Findings**

Our earliest experiences of rhythm go back to the womb and the dominant presence of our mother's heartbeat. 60-100 beats per minute, relaxed body state.

Patterned, repetitive rhythmic activities can be found in the healing and mourning rituals, dancing, drumming, swaying and chanting of all cultures around the world.

Brainstem neurons are shown to fire synchrony with tempo; Trauma authorities incorporate rhythmic exercises including music and movement.

Repetitive stimuli of drumming increases levels of focus and attention and when used with a learning objective can improve a level of response. Vocal affirmations of self-worth or behavioural changes.

Rhythm permeates every aspect of life. 'We are rhythmic beings living in a rhythmic universe'.

The word Rhythm comes from the Greek word 'To flow'. As patterns, habits and routines dominate human behaviour, drumming can be an effective form of therapy.

Basic altered states of perception can be measured with electroencephalography (EEG) which gives us information about the number of brainwave cycles/rhythmic pulses we produce per second (on the Hertz) scale

Beta 13 and 38 cycles per second. (normal outwardly focused)

Alpha 8-12 cycles per second. (relaxation, meditation and daydreaming, here and now)

Theta 4-7 cycles per second (twilight - just before sleep, deep meditation, or lucid dreaming)

Delta fewer than 4 cycles per second (sleep)

cited in Mackinnon (2016)

Barry Quinn Ph.D demonstrates that even a brief drumming session can double alpha brain wave activity, which can dramatically reduce stress. The physiological changes associated with Altered States of Consciousness facilitate healing and physiological process reduce anxiety, manipulation and psychosomatic effects.

The Beta state is the normal outwardly focused state. Alpha is associated with meditation, shamanic trance and integrative modes of consciousness.

A drumbeat frequency of around 180 beats per minute is sustained for at least 15 mins, it will induce significant states in most people, even on their first attempt.

The Royal College of Music found that the 10-week group drumming programme reduced depression by as much as 38% and anxiety by 20%. A preliminary study published in *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* and a controlled study revealed that a 10 week of group drumming can improve social resilience by 23% and mental wellbeing by 16%. It was the first research of its kind to bring together psychological and biological results to gain a more complete picture of how music benefits mental health services users. The research looked at 76 mental health service users in London involving a 6- and 10-week programme of group drumming. The participants completed questionnaires measuring depression, anxiety, stress and mental wellbeing and saliva samples taken for biological responses.

Diggins particular practice of sound therapy has been shaped by his studies with a Columbian Shaman, a Jungian therapist, and African Griot, and Australian Aborigine and a few professors from the University of Toronto, the challenge Diggins says 'is to frame this ancient practice in a way that makes it accessible to wider cultural circles'.

In his group settings, clients connect with other drummers and create a supportive community and that supports the positive impact for them, and others; the actual drumming and connecting with their own emotional experience.

Barry Bittman a Neurologist co developed a programme for REMO called Health rhythms and found group drumming and music played recreationally increased the body's production of cancer killing t-cells, decreases stress and can change the genomic stress marker.

This links in with Michael Drake's exploration, that researchers suggest that drumming serves as a distraction from pain and grief, it promotes the production of endorphins and endogenous opiates, the body's own morphine like pain killers and there can thereby help to control pain. These work with the neurotransmitters in the brain and reduce our perception of pain and act in a similar way to the drugs such as morphine and codeine, which do not, when naturally produced by the body, result in addiction or dependency.

Drake also suggests that drumming synchronizes the frontal and lower areas of the brain, integrating nonverbal information from lower brain structures into the frontal cortex thus producing feeling of insight, understanding, integration, certainty, conviction and truth which surpass ordinary understandings and persist long after the experience. Often providing foundational insights for religious and cultural traditions.

It is shown that drumming may be a powerful tool in helping the brains of people who have some level of damage or impairment such as ADHD, Parkinson's or after suffering a stroke.

Mark Seaman carried out a research programme in 2001, he himself was recovering from addiction and was searching for a natural altered state of consciousness, he encouraged participants to pick up and play a drum on entering the room and are free to play as they choose, and then warm up exercises without emphasising anything technical, also including a vocal chanting/singing activity to increase the energy of the group, using nonverbal communication allowing how they feel to be played through the drums, call and response is also used to allow the participants to use the drum to connect to their feelings. This engages in the creation of improvisational music that produces feelings of accomplishment and engages a "Letting Go" process through visualisation.

Seaman ends his programme with an application of Alcoholics Anonymous 11<sup>th</sup> step (meditation) using meditation music and a variety of percussion instruments to reinforce a visualisation process to connect with a higher power.

He states that " I get people relaxed, give them permission to leave their body and go on a journey. I talk about forgiveness, acceptance and surrender. I work (on) releases of guilt from the wreckage that they have produced through their addictions. The visual imagery connects with the inner child, to release baggage, to awaken true potential, to imagine contact with higher power that covers and embraces them in a space of joy and healing".

The effects on the participants suggests drumming produces an altered state of consciousness and an experience of a rush of energy from the vibrations, with physical stimulation producing emotional release, he says "all of us need to connect to ourselves, to our soul, to a higher power. Drum brings this out. Drum penetrate people at a deeper level. Drumming produces a sense of connectedness and community, integrating body, mind and spirit"

*Myron Eshowsky's Shamanic Counselling* approach has been used since the mid-1980s working with a wide range of clients from inpatient psychiatric care settings, prisons to private practice. His success led the drug and alcohol unit of his agency to refer clients with a history of severe addiction and significant health issues. The programs involve a mix of activities storytelling, journaling, healing work, dance, spiritual divination, group ceremonies and he engages adolescents in drumming activities and teaches them to journey on their own. Participants report that the drumming and shamanic journeying calm them down and help them deal with their high-level stress. Eshowsky's work with Shamanic healing is often effective for people in desperate situations, when other counselling modalities have failed.

*Daniel Smith's Shamanic Approach* has been used when he introduced drumming into his work as a licensed clinical social worker in a substance rehabilitation programme in St. Louis Mo. Smith says that drumming and Shamanic activities address addiction through reintegrating aspects of the self in rituals for soul retrieval and power animal retrieval. Through these activities, people gain access to traumatic assault that have driven their abusive relations with drugs.

*The Rythem2recovery* integrative model of practice combing experiential therapy techniques with CBT (ACT =acceptance and commitment therapy and positive psychology (PP). Mindfulness with a drumming pulse. Working with acceptance and detaching from some more challenging parts of ourselves rather than trying to banish them all together. Value is important and meaningful to individuals, PP focuses on wellbeing and life satisfaction avoids negative emotions and symptom relief therefore building self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality and positive relationships.

Developing a trusting relationship through drumming, in that not setting the expectations too high, too soon, build on the therapeutic relationship, connecting to the rhythm. Faulkner goes on to inform;

The drum can be a vehicle for building safety, trust and connection. The counsellor should be side on to the client and invite them to play the drum for fun opening the work together. "I'll play something and you join in by either copying me or finding your own rhythm- something that connects to mine".

Use a simple pattern to avoid too much eye contact at this point - focus on the drum.  
Play how that felt on your drum, can you put a name or names to that feeling. The use of the drum raises energy levels and avoids the gaping silence that often accompanies a question that focus attention on the individual and may cause shame or embarrassment. Resulting in cultural awareness, holding the space in closed group trust and dealing with behavioural issues. The drum as your voice, the drum as your heart- relaying messages, communicate orders or announcements. Safe vessel to pour your emotions into. Creating team harmony.

'The healing that occurs at the heart of effective therapy remain something of a mystery!'  
~ William West.

Drum therapy is an ancient approach that uses rhythm to promote healing and self-expression. The presence of the drum to find a fast, nonverbal connection to each other. In a group drumming circle, it gives a sense of belonging and place.

Rhythm is an element of music associated with timing and repetition it binds people, synchronising elements of the brain and our emotions 'being in one with each other' denotes any predictable pattern over the course of time.

It is concluded that drumming circles, together with altered states of consciousness activities can and may address multiple needs of addicted populations, producing a relaxation response, restoring balance in the opioid and serotonergic neurotransmitter systems, self-awareness and insight, emotional healing and psychological integration, contact with a higher power and spiritual experience and a social need to connect with others and interpersonal support. Winkelman (2003)

### **My Survey conducted in 2019**

I completed my own drum awareness survey using social media, paper questionnaire and emailed participants.

I received an amazing response of 70 of which 57 were female, 11 male and 1 person preferred not to answer, one respondent skipped this question.

The age range was from 25 - 65+ with the greatest percentage aged between 45-54 totally 42.86% (30).

60.87% (42) were in the counselling profession with 34 of those being a student.

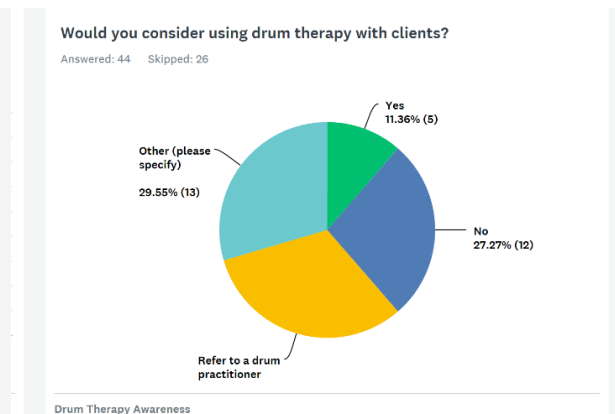
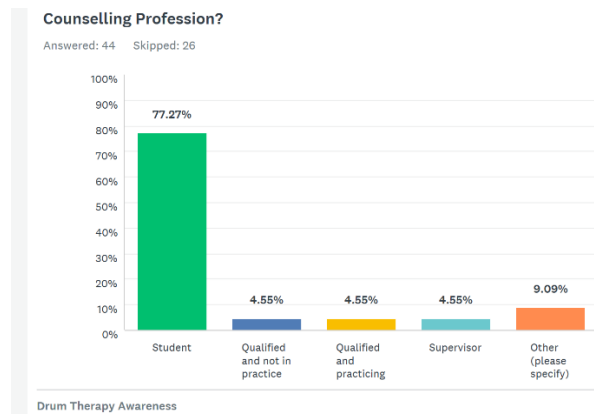
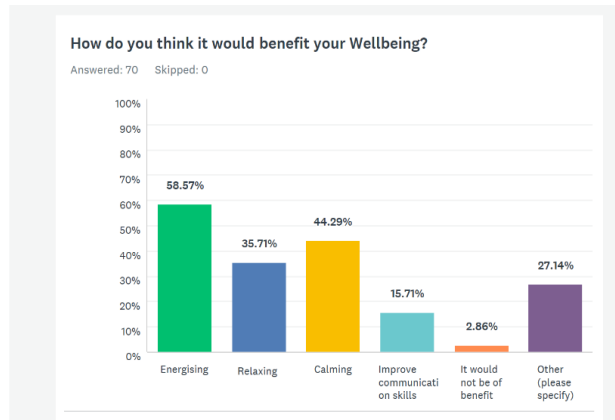
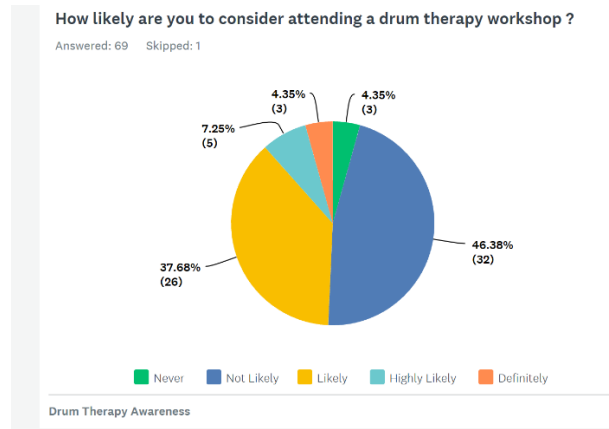
The first question I asked have you ever heard of Drum Therapy? 47.14% (33) responded with a Yes and 35%(50) responded with a No the two-remaining responded with other and left the following comments "*not as such but familiar with drum use in shamanic therapeutic forms*" and "*Have heard of sound therapy*". Of the 42 in the counselling profession 14 had heard of drum therapy.

I then asked what you think is meant by Sound Therapy, as drum could be considered part of sound therapy along with singing bowls, gongs and other musical and vocal mediums.

58.57% thought listening to music, 18.57% being part of a choir, 28.57% playing and instrument and 45.71% specified as other.

The response of participants considering attending a drum therapy workshop, there was an almost equal split of those who would consider as likely, highly likely and consider attending a drum therapy workshop. I found this to be very encouraging. 75% (51) indicated that they would prefer to experience a drum therapy session in a small group, with 14.7% (10) preferring a 1:1. 10.29%(7)

indicated that they would prefer a larger group of 11+. 2 people skipped this question and the remaining 8.82% (6) responded as other.



## My Findings

I found the research to be extremely rewarding, the secondary research assisted in me putting into context my understanding of drum therapy and healing and the different modalities that could be explored with this type of therapy with a range of clients. It appears that it is most effective when working with addiction, young people and perhaps beneficial to those people with health conditions, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that it increases the wellbeing of participants that took part in studies.

My research was more subjective by finding out the awareness of drumming as a therapy. I was incredibly surprised by the amount of positive response to the benefits and wellbeing perceived by the respondents who took part in the survey.



I feel that the statistics show there is almost an equal split between the awareness of drum therapy and having never heard of it across all 70 participants. The response of participants considering attending a drum therapy workshop, there was an almost equal split of those who would consider as likely, highly likely and consider attending a drum therapy workshop. I found this to be very encouraging. 75% (51) indicated that they would prefer to experience a drum therapy session in a small group, with 14.7 (10) preferring a 1:1. 10.29%(7) indicated that they would prefer a larger group of 11+.

I found the results of the effect on wellbeing with 57% stating it would be energizing 35% relaxing 44% calming 15% improve communication skills 2% not of benefit and 27% other that included altered states of consciousness and altering brain patterns. A few comments about it being noisy/intrusive or of not benefit were a very small percentage and based perhaps on the participants own perception, having neither received nor participated in a drum circle.

There are some people that "this is not for me", that is fine, not all therapy works for all people and sometimes it may stop working altogether as the body adjusts and resets.

It is an invitation, to participate that can be declined by both the client and the counsellor.

I was able to establish that drum therapy fits into the Gestalt/Transpersonal style of therapy and can be very experiential when used during a journey or mediation with a gentle heartbeat rhythm. This could assist the client into an altered state of consciousness more quickly than with visualisation alone. Drumming could be used when connecting to inner child, connecting to self, animal, person to receive a gift and any other way to support the client.

I am aware that this type of therapy may not be suitable for all clients, however using an integrative approach it could be invited by the counsellor for the client to participate depending on the work being undertaken at the time. It may be useful with a client that is finding it difficult to communicate how they are feeling verbally, and it could be invited, that they drum out their feeling in a session.

There is perhaps a stigma attached to this type of therapy of being a bit hippy, way out or even scary due to the use in Shamanic cultures. However, there is a new type of label that is Neoshamanic.

Neoshamanism refers to "new" forms of **shamanism**, or methods of seeking visions or healing. ... Neoshamanic systems may not resemble traditional forms of **shamanism**. Some have been invented by individual practitioners, though many borrow or gain inspiration from a variety of different indigenous cultures. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoshamanism>.

I believe that the West has started to incorporate the work of the indigenous tribes and the use of the drum as a healing tool and it is being adapted for the modern way of the world. As has been identified by the research carried out on the benefits of drumming and sound healing on health and mental wellbeing, having the opportunity to raise awareness can only be a good thing, if I am able to support clients on their journey of self-healing.

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