

Laughter Therapy as an Intervention to Promote Psychological Well-Being.

Michael Mbiriri Ph.D

Department of Psychology
Kisii University, Kenya.

ORCID number: 0000-0003-2037-5806
mikembiriri2020@kisiiversity.ac.ke

Abstract

Laughter might be thought of as an audible expression or appearance of inward, positive feelings of happiness and joy. Laughter is physical reaction to human consisting of rhythmical and audible contraction of the diaphragm and other parts of respiratory systems. Laughter is a response to external or internal stimuli or both. It is sometimes seen as contagious in that laughter from one person can provoke laughter to others.

Laughter is beneficial to the human body. It produces endorphin chemical in the body which works in the brain to bring feeling of contentment. Laughter provides an outlet for negative emotions and provides effective coping mechanism for distress. It stimulates physiological system that decreases levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and epinephrine and increasing activation of dopamine rewards system of the brain.

Laughter is a positive sensation and seems to be an effective way of overcoming social-economic stress in our modern competitive society.

Laughter therapy, as a non-pharmacological, alternative treatment has a positive effect on physiological well-being.

The article examines research evidence for the notion that laughter has beneficial effects on psychological and physiological well-being. Theoretical mechanism for such effects will be discussed as well. Empirical evidence for the benefit of humour and laughter will be summarized.

Key Words: *Laughter therapy, stimulated laughter, spontaneous laughter, joy, happiness humour*

Introduction

Laughter therapy uses humor to help relieve pain and stress and improve a sense of psychological well-being. Laughter falls into five main categories spontaneous (external), stimulated (reflex), induced (chemical), pathological (brain damage), simulated (self - induced). Laughter have shown a quantifiable physiological and psychological positive effects on certain aspects of health (Mora – Ripoll, 2011)

Therapeutic laughter can be used in mental health with preventive intent or complementary alternative approach to other established therapeutic strategies. (Martin, 2007). There is scientific evidence that human brains produce morphine like- molecules known as endorphin and laughter helps to activate the release of these endorphin. Endorphin are produced by central nervous system and pituitary gland. Laughter stimulates endorphin production, (Dunbar. R, Baron, F. Pearcel, N. 2011). When one is laughing the brain releases endorphins which lead to reduction of stress hormones such as cortisol and epinephrine.

Laughter can be defined as vocal- respiratory behaviour response that involves set of muscles, specific movements, facial and vocal expression. In psychology, laughter is seen as the marker of positive effect and as a response that promotes good effects. It is usually not involuntary but