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Sensory Modulation Interventions for adults with mental illness: A scoping review

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Introduction: Adults with mental illnesses have distinct sensory processing patterns. Sensory Modulation Interventions (SMI), used in Occupational Therapy, have been found to assist them in regulating emotional and physiological arousal, which enhances participation in meaningful occupations. Understanding the experiences of clients undergoing SMI could enrich client-centred practice for better functional outcomes.

Objectives: To identify the range of study designs and the modality/regimen used, strengths and limitations and geographical distribution of studies done and to understand the experiences of adults with mental illness in studies related to the sensory modulation interventions for adults with mental illness.

Method: Arksey & O'Malley scoping review framework was used in the current review. Articles published from January 2010 to November 2020 were searched in nine electronic databases. Full text interventional studies on adults (18+ years) with mental illness, published in English were included. Studies on adults with childhood psychiatric disorders and neuropsychiatric conditions were excluded.

Results: Out of the total 159 articles, 27 articles were included in this scoping review. The majority of the studies were either qualitative or pilot studies. Sensory rooms and sensory boxes were commonly used with proprioception being the most commonly used sensory modality. Most of the studies were done in Australia and participants undergoing SMI expressed feeling safe, calm, relaxed, optimistic, empowered, and self-efficient. Some experienced anxiety, boredom & unpleasant sensations.

Conclusion: SMI may be useful for adults with mental illnesses to engage in meaningful daily life activities. However, future studies on understanding this relationship are recommended.

Keywords: Sensory Modulation, Interventions, Mental Illness