BACKGROUND

Sleep problems are highly prevalent in modern society, especially among persons with psychiatric disorders\(^1\). Persons who have experienced severe trauma often have great difficulties sleeping, and nightmares and insomnia symptoms are part of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Poor sleep quality can result in negative consequences such as fatigue, dysphoria, impaired memory and reduced immune-system functioning\(^1\). Therefore, viable interventions to improve sleep quality are of great value to both the individual and society. Studies have found that music listening can improve sleep in persons with sleep problems due to depression\(^2\), schizophrenia\(^3\) and physical abuse\(^4\), but the effect on trauma-related sleep problems has not yet been studied.

AIM

The aim of this pilot study was to investigate the effect of bedtime music listening on sleep quality in traumatized refugees.

METHOD

An experimental repeated measures design was used, and the dependent variable 'sleep quality' was measured by the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI). Fifteen traumatized refugees with sleep problems participated in the study, and the intervention group received a music player designed to be used in bed every night and an ergonomic pillow. The control group received only the ergonomic pillow.

RESULTS

The participants listening to music experienced a significant improvement of sleep quality from pre to post intervention. No change was found in the control group. The data showed a significant pretest difference between the groups, with the music group experiencing more sleep problems prior to the intervention. Still, both groups suffered from considerable sleeping difficulties with scores well above the score 5 that separates 'good' and 'poor' sleepers\(^5\). To control for this pretest difference a change score was calculated and statistical comparisons revealed that the music group experienced significantly more improvement in sleep quality than the control group (t (13) = 2.25; p < .05).

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings indicate that listening to slow relaxing music at bedtime can have a positive effect on subjective sleep quality in traumatized refugees. In line with former studies, the results provide evidence for the use of music as a non-pharmacological intervention for sleep problems. When considering the invalidating effect of sleep problems along with several other stressing life circumstances in the population of traumatized refugees, music provides a low-cost, safe and pleasant intervention that is easy to implement. The present findings also provide an optimistic basis for further research on the impact of music on sleep.

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References:
\(^{3}\)Bloch et al. (2010). The effects of music relaxation on sleep quality and emotional measures in people living with schizophrenia. Journal of Music Therapy, 47(2), 71-82.

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