Environmental Sustainability Attitudes and Practices of New Zealand Remedial Massage Therapists

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Background

Environmental sustainability (ES) is a key concern in many people's personal and professional lives. Environmental issues adversely affect our quality of life as well as our health. Anthropogenic activity is causing climate change and its resultant health problems (Gore, 2017), however current practices of the healthcare sector are contributing to ecological decay (Smith, 2012). This paradox forms the basis of this research project. As remedial massage therapists (RMTs), we help people, so how can we promote true salutogenesis by practising eco-friendly massage? Little is known about ES within massage therapy (MT) although common sense dictates that solutions require balancing the client’s needs (e.g. hygiene) with practical eco-friendly alternatives.

Objectives

To provide initial insight into ES attitudes and practices of RMTs in NZ, reduce the void in current MT literature, and gain a sense of the participants' eco-literacy.

Method

- Online questionnaire (Survey Monkey).
- Questions: 30 quantitative (Likert, multiple choice), 4 qualitative (open ended).
- Data collected on demographics, RMTs' current environmental awareness, sustainable clinical practices, and barriers to ES practices.
- Inclusion criteria: NZ RMTs with a minimum massage-specific qualification of a NZQA Level 6 Diploma.

Participants

- 54 respondents.
- 84.9% female (n=45/54).
- Ages evenly spread: 18-52 years.
- 44.4% < 5 years MT experience; 38.9% had 11+ years MT experience.
- Respondents from 13/16 NZ regions.

Personal Statement

As healthcare professionals we take a holistic approach to health and wellness and this should incorporate the environment. Failing to adopt this holistic approach to the environment, we are in part contributing to the pathogenesis of our clients. We only have one earth, just as we only have one Earth and unless we take care of them, they will be in bad shape when we get older. (JW) was encouraged to see positive eco-friendly attitudes and practices being implemented within the New Zealand remedial massage therapy industry. Furthermore, as role-models for our clients, we influence them through our practices and may inspire them to consider their own ES attitudes and practices.

Let's start saving the world one massage at a time.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Disagree (1-3)</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)</th>
<th>Agree (5-7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand the concept of environmental sustainability.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that there are hidden environmental costs involved in imported products.</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have measures in place to minimise my waste production in my massage practice.</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have measures in place to minimise my waste production at home.</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am environmentally conscious as a massage therapist in my practice.</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am environmentally friendly at home.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion and Implications

Results showed over two thirds of participants demonstrated ES awareness and eco-friendly attitudes (Fig. 1). There was alignment between their ES attitudes and their eco-friendly behaviours at home and in their MT practice (Fig. 2).

While there were a number of therapists using reusable containers, wipes and spatulas, disposable products were still in use (Table 1). The survey did not include the waste management strategies for these disposable products and could be included in further studies.

Practitioners also noted a need for more education on eco-friendly practices as knowledge levels was a barrier to implementing eco-friendly practices (Fig. 3). Eco-literacy is sustainability in action and applies basic knowledge of ecosystems to live in harmony with our environment (McGinn, 2014). This study suggests increasing knowledge and strategies surrounding eco-literacy for the MT classroom and clinic would be of benefit, possibly through curricula and workshops. This is a good starting point for future studies in this area and will hopefully encourage the MT community to consider their ES attitudes and practices.

Limitations

The small number of respondents limits the generalisability of this study.

Inclusion criteria: not all members of the MT industry were included; they may have demonstrated a greater variation in responses based on their practice and education level.

References:

