Perceptions of Non-Users of Massage Therapy in Southland

Melody Dickinson, Kenny Giles & Donna Smith

Abstract

Introduction: A number of studies from around the world have shown significant growth in the use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), including massage therapy. However, there is a lack of literature involving non-users of massage therapy.

Aim: The purpose of this project was to investigate the perceptions of non-users of massage therapy within Southland - why they don’t use massage, what they use instead, and what circumstances may lead them to use massage therapy in the future.

Methodology: A qualitative approach was used. Eleven participants participated in two separate focus groups which employed a semi-structured, open-ended interviewing process. A key set of questions were followed in an open-ended manner. Participants (non-users of massage over 16 years) were recruited via purposeful selection and took part in two focus groups (n=6, n=5) held at the Southern Institute of Technology. Focus group interviews took 30-45 minutes. Ethnic groups and demographics were not sought. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and thematic analysis was used to group themes.

Results: Reasons for not using massage therapy varied between different participants. The main reasons identified during this study were lack of knowledge, fear of the unknown, time and financial restraints, availability, image of the industry, and generational differences in the way massage is perceived.

Conclusion: Information regarding massage therapy is often scarce, confusing, and contradictory. Reasons why massage is not used by some members of the population is not widely understood and more research is required. The implication for the massage industry is that massage practitioners may need to acknowledge that barriers do exist for some members of the public. Despite the best efforts of the industry to educate the public about massage therapy, there needs to be a certain level of acceptance that massage may not be suitable for all members of the public.

Key Points
- Lack of Knowledge
- Cost
- Availability
- Confusion about Services
- Low Perceived Need
- Concerns of the Unknown
- Viewed as a Luxury

Recommendations
Due to a lack of information about non-users of massage therapy, the researchers recommend more research in this area.
- Larger sample size using a questionnaire.
- Investigation of non-user demographics.
- More consistent and accurate information about services.