Introduction

Morbidity and mortality rates are higher in psychiatric patients than in the general population. Mental illness not only affects clients’ minds but also their physical health. Physical problems in turn affect their re-integration into community, mood, social life and work. Evidence shows that physical exercise improves mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and negative mood, improving self-esteem, cognitive functioning and quality of life as a whole.

Objectives

1. To establish habit of physical exercise or running. 2. To increase clients’ awareness in physical wellbeing and hence to live a healthy life. 3. To acquire running skills. 4. To strengthen clients’ psychological wellbeing as according to principles of recovery: Self-determination, hope, individualization, peer support, nonlinear development, personal responsibility and strength perspective.

Methodology

A “Pre-test” vs. “Post-test” design was employed. Assessment tools of DASS (Depression Anxiety Stress Scales) and RAS (Recovery Assessment Scale) were used to measure clients’ levels of depression, anxiety, stress and recovery. Subjects were patients with psychotic spectrum disorders. Intervention was six-sessions running therapy group. One session was held once a week. The content
of the group ranged from basic running skills, warm-up and cool-down exercises, target heart rate and body mass index, peer support in running, healthy life and dietary, reduced rumination of negative thoughts, management of side effect of gaining weight and setting goals. Sequence of each session was often interweaving of stretching exercise, jogging/walking, teaching and sharing/debriefing.

**Result**

In total, 15 patients participated in the group. 11 of them attended at least 5 sessions out of 6. Dropout rate was low compared with other activities of the same clientele. No significant difference was found in levels of depression, anxiety, stress and recovery between pre and post-group. Under the assessment of recovery, personal confidence and hope is positively correlated to the number of attended sessions at significant level, $p<.05$. Moreover, client’s feedbacks to the group were positive. In descriptive terms, clients felt better sleep, had improved energy level and mood, and were able to make friends in the group. Last but not least, most of participants continue to do physical exercise after the group and were willing to join physical exercise organized by a NGO. In conclusion, running therapy group was effective in improving mental health of psychotic patients. It also proved that although mental health affects physical health, physical exercise improves mental health.