Mics & Minds
An ongoing ethnographic and quantitative study of urban music facilitation in mental health recovery

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Background:
Arts and health research has been promising with a wide-range of activities and outcomes. One neglected area is urban music. Hip-hop and rap (HHR) is a popular musical format and cultural movement historically rooted in storytelling and social commentary in ostracized communities. Key Changes is a social enterprise offering HHR-focused performance, recording and career development services to individuals under psychiatric care. This study examines how Key Changes enhances mental health recovery through urban music.

Methodology:
i) Participant observation and extensive field notes over 9 months preceded an ongoing series of thematically analysed interviews (N = 5).
ii) Heart rate monitoring for rappers during controlled writing and recording session in the Key Changes studios (N = 6). Data collection is ongoing.

Emerging theme 1: Connection with others
a: Reintegrating by activating deep, embodied cultural knowledge
b: Therapeutic relationships with mentors
c: Dissatisfaction with traditional healthcare relationships
d: Musical collaboration as a default behaviour

Emerging theme 2: Understanding and expanding identity
a: Transforming from patient to artist
b: Transforming from victim to guide
c: Transforming from hobbyist to aspiring professional

Emerging theme 3: Meaning making
a: Seeking mastery as meaning-giving
b: Close contact with professional artists giving hope and motivation
c: Making music for the community as giving meaning to personal suffering

Rappers heart rates during controlled song-writing and recording sessions
What happens to the body when artists create?
N=6, with issues following protocol

Potential patterns to explore:

i) Very sudden drop in heart rate to below baseline immediately after final recording attempt

ii) Increased heart rate during writing phase when artist pauses whilst writing or edits work