



Importance of Music Participation on Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Senior Citizens during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Keywords:

Music participation, Music therapy, Mental health, Wellbeing, Senior citizens, COVID-19

Received

17 April 2022

Received in revised form

05 September 2022

Accepted

14 September 2022

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ABSTRACT

As life expectancy continues to increase, it is critical to investigate ways to age successfully physically, mentally, and socially. Senior citizens (65 years and older) tend to struggle with lower mental health and wellbeing and suffer higher incidences of loneliness compared to the younger population. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic has put them at higher risk, not only of contracting the virus, but also of experiencing feelings of loneliness and depression. Music participation, specifically music therapy, has been known to be an effective tool to promote wellbeing and mental health, especially among the elderly. Thus, this article investigates the changes in mental health and wellbeing among elderly people when participating in music to explore the importance of conducting virtual music participation programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Aging happens naturally among all living creatures [1]. However, as time progresses, with the development of medicine and technology, the size of the elderly population (65 years and older) has been expanding due to longer life expectancy; but along with this benefit come numerous chronic conditions. The senior population is expected to double by 2050, increasing to an estimated 83.7 million older adults in comparison to 43.1 million older adults in 2012 [2]. Humans are social creatures, which means it is vital for them to interact and connect to thrive. However, finding and maintaining social connections is challenging for the elderly population as many of them tend to live alone, eventually

leading to social isolation and loneliness [3]. Additionally, the 2019 coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic contributed significantly to social isolation as the outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in numerous lockdowns, social gathering restrictions, and social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As a result, people lost their daily life patterns, no longer able to interact with their loved ones because they lived in fear of contracting the virus or transmitting it to others. Significantly, elderly people are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, and thus, their mental health and wellbeing have been greatly disturbed [4]. However, studies show that engaging in meaningful and productive activities can provide a sense of purpose which enhances an elderly participant's mood, and thereby improves cognitive function and wellbeing [5]. This can be accomplished through music therapy, which boosts an individual's mental health [6]. However, such in-person music activities and live music performances were halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, thus requiring alternate platforms to deliver music activities virtually [7]. Therefore, it is critical to conduct a closer examination of such music programs on elderly participants to determine the effect on mental health and wellbeing, before actively promoting the effectiveness of online music activities during the present COVID-19 pandemic.

Mental Health and Wellbeing of Senior Citizens

The World Health Organization has highlighted numerous risk factors that could potentially threaten the mental health of older adults. These include significant ongoing loss in capacities, social isolation, psychological distress, loneliness, and decline in functional ability, among others. Many seniors may struggle with chronic pain, frailty, reduced mobility and/or other health conditions, which are challenging to treat in a timely manner [8]. Depression is one of the most serious and common mental disorders among senior citizens as about half of elderly populations live with symptoms of depression [9]. Depression reduces quality of life, loss of social function, and incline of mortality as it is closely associated with social, emotional, physical, and psychological impairments [10]. It is critical, therefore, to alleviate these negative problems. Maintaining good mental health and wellbeing is important; thus, it is vital to promote its significance for the elderly. Wellbeing is based on an individual's life satisfaction. Six interventions can lead to such satisfaction, including life purpose, personal growth, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of the environment, and self-acceptance. If wellbeing declines, then individuals will undergo a state of disengagement and social withdrawal, which leads to psychological and physical consequences [11]. Studies have emphasized that promoting wellbeing is the path to successful aging, along with an absence of social restrictions, cognitive disabilities, and physical impairments [12, 13, 14]. Thus, interventions on behalf of wellbeing will help to improve happiness, life satisfaction, anxiety, working memory, quality of sleep, and mindfulness. Incorporating social and cognitive engagement along with physical activity can diminish the influence of loneliness on an older population, which would greatly enhance mental health [15].

Music Participation and Its Effects

Music is wonderful in the many ways that it impacts health. Much evidence has demonstrated the effectiveness of music therapy for senior citizens as it leads to a decline in depression and an incline in emotional wellbeing and social engagement [16]. Music participation is one of the most successful interventions in boosting an individual's mental health and wellbeing, specifically known as a form of therapy. Music therapy is run by board-certified music therapists who are capable of utilizing music and its meaningful components, along with their professional knowledge, as an intervention in medical, educational, and everyday environments. A music therapy session does not only include passive listening to music. It also involves participants actively engaging in composing, playing or interacting with music [10]. Participants work with other participants in the session to listen to live or recorded music while discussing and sharing their thoughts, which provides a great advantage for a participant's mental health [6]. For instance, during a group singing session, participants have an opportunity to learn

music and practise singing afterwards as a group, which is a great way to promote adult health [17]. Furthermore, during a live music therapy session, participants will interact with each other by listening, improvising, and making and talking about music, which highlights the power of music [7]. These interventions are especially beneficial for senior citizens as they help to improve social engagement and emotional wellbeing, while diminishing depression [16]. Music therapy also has a positive effect on the elderly with dementia as it assists with enhancing cognitive, emotional, and communication skills while minimizing levels of agitation [18].

Conclusion

It is clear that music participation is indeed an effective intervention tool to enhance and promote senior citizens' mental health and wellbeing. It helps to improve quality of life, cognitive function, depression, disruptive behaviour, anxiety, and dementia. All of these are critical dimensions for examination, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in which the elderly population is highly vulnerable to acquiring a loss of wellbeing [19]. Since the COVID-19 pandemic has changed individual life patterns significantly, numerous people need to be flexible to adapt to a virtual environment. Although there are many studies highlighting the effectiveness of music participation on an individual's mental health, a lack of studies exists to investigate the positive impact of music participation on seniors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, it is important to take a further step to focus on the benefits of online music participation to show its effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it can offer an additional opportunity for anyone who is not able to participate in an in-person music therapy session, to participate virtually [20, 21].

Declarations

Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

Funding Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

Citation to this article

Park J, Johnson PA, Johnson JC, Mardon AA. Importance of music participation on mental health and wellbeing among senior citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Canadian Journal of Medicine*. 2022 Sep 23;4(2):51-54. doi: 10.33844/cjm.2022.6022

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