

Music Therapy and the Art of Elderly Mind-Body Remodelling

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Abstract: By 2025, China's aging population is accelerating with nearly 18% aged 65 and above, creating urgent demands for diverse elderly care solutions. This study examines the role of music therapy as a safe, low-cost, and accessible non-pharmacological intervention to address key aging-related challenges such as social isolation and chronic pain. Grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Erikson's psychosocial development theory, the research employs literature analysis, field studies, and experiments to explore the multidimensional effects of music therapy on emotional regulation, social interaction, physical coordination, and cognitive function in the elderly. Results demonstrate that music therapy significantly alleviates social isolation, depression, anxiety, and loneliness, while enhancing positive emotions, reducing chronic pain, and delaying cognitive decline. The study concludes by proposing promotion strategies involving policy support, professional training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and public awareness to establish a sustainable model for integrating music therapy into community and institutional elderly care, offering theoretical and practical insights for improving health and quality of life in an aging society.

Keywords: music therapy, elderly population, population aging, physical and mental health

1. Introduction

1.1 Current Status and Trends of Population Ageing in China

By 2025, China's ageing process will continue to accelerate, characterised by its large scale, rapid pace, and pronounced regional disparities. According to the latest statistical projections, the proportion of the population aged 65 and above has approached 18%, with trends towards advanced age and disability becoming increasingly pronounced. With the cohort born in the 1960s gradually entering old age, profound shifts are occurring in the societal structure of ageing, accompanied by explosive growth in demand for diversified elderly care services and health support. Against the backdrop of a gradually diminishing demographic dividend, the development of elderly care service systems, integration of medical resources, and technology-assisted ageing have become key national strategic priorities. The 14th Five-Year Plan for National Ageing Development and Elderly Care Service System explicitly proposes establishing a new model of elderly care that "coordinates home-based, community-based and institutional care while integrating medical treatment with health and wellness services" to address the intensifying pressures of ageing[1].

1.2 Physical and Mental Health Challenges Facing the Elderly Population and Their Social and Recreational Needs

As societal ageing intensifies, the physical and mental health issues confronting the elderly population have become increasingly prominent, emerging as critical public health concerns requiring urgent attention. On the psychological front, widespread issues such as loneliness, diminished self-worth, and depression significantly impact the quality of life for older adults. These challenges not only exacerbate the care burdens on individuals and families but also pose severe challenges to societal healthcare resources. On the physiological front, prevalent chronic conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes progressively erode physical function and accelerate health deterioration[2][3][4]. These interrelated challenges collectively pose systemic threats to the physical and mental wellbeing of older adults. Consequently, there is an urgent need to establish a multi-tiered intervention system. This should integrate psychological support, cognitive function preservation, and chronic disease management to provide comprehensive health safeguards for the elderly.

Furthermore, meeting the spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly and promoting their social and recreational activities are equally crucial. Research indicates that rich social and recreational activities can effectively improve the psychological state of the elderly, enhance their social interaction abilities, and to some extent delay physical and mental decline[5][6][7].

Against this backdrop, music therapy, as a non-pharmacological intervention, has progressively emerged as a vital means to enhance the health outcomes of the elderly. By regulating physiological mechanisms such as heart rate and lowering blood pressure, music therapy can effectively improve the health status of chronic disease patients. Simultaneously, it

stimulates dopamine secretion in the brain, alleviating anxiety and depressive symptoms while elevating well-being and life satisfaction[8].

2. Research Project

This study aims to investigate the application and efficacy of music therapy among individuals aged 65 to 75. It seeks to explore the therapeutic effects of music therapy in alleviating social isolation and chronic pain within this demographic. Through music therapy interventions, the research endeavours to mitigate social isolation and chronic pain, improve physical and mental health issues, and promote social interaction and recreational activities. Consequently, it aims to significantly enhance quality of life and psychological wellbeing.

2.1 Research Objectives

The study evaluates music therapy's role in alleviating social isolation and chronic pain. Through this research, we aim to provide scientific evidence for enhancing the wellbeing and happiness of the elderly population, promoting their enjoyment of a healthy, joyful, and fulfilling later life, and offering theoretical and empirical support for future policy formulation and optimisation of social services.

2.2 Research Participants

The research team selected elderly individuals aged 65–75 for observation. Participants comprised seniors of both genders in good physical health, with no significant limitations on daily activities or basic living capabilities, and maintaining sound physical condition. Individuals within this age bracket typically experience multiple significant life transitions, such as retirement and children becoming independent. These factors may lead to emotional fluctuations, lifestyle changes, and reduced social engagement. In such circumstances, both physical and mental health become vulnerable. Psychologically, issues such as social isolation, low mood, diminished self-worth, and loneliness may arise. Physically, many suffer from chronic pain conditions including arthritis, rheumatism, and migraines. These emotional and physical challenges not only diminish well-being and quality of life but may also precipitate cognitive decline and deteriorating physical health. Within the elderly population, the pervasive presence of social isolation and chronic pain constitutes a long-term and latent risk to their physical and mental wellbeing.

2.3 Research Methods

Literature Analysis Method: Reviewing domestic and international literature on music therapy for the elderly to explore its efficacy in alleviating social isolation and chronic pain.

Field Research Method: Collaborating with offline care homes to observe the practical effects of music therapy on elderly populations through on-site implementation.

Case Study Method: Through diverse data collection, researchers compiled unique profiles for each participant to explore individualised intervention outcomes and mechanisms.

Interview Method: Conducting in-depth conversations with elderly participants to more flexibly document their therapeutic responses.

3. Significance

3.1 Necessity

With the intensification of China's population ageing, the elderly population's needs regarding physical and mental health are increasingly significant. This demographic is particularly vulnerable to health challenges such as chronic diseases, cognitive decline, and emotional issues, where traditional pharmacological treatments and medical interventions sometimes fall short of addressing their comprehensive requirements. Music therapy, as a non-pharmacological intervention, can enhance the quality of life for the elderly by regulating emotions, improving cognitive function, and alleviating pain. Furthermore, the state's growing emphasis on the physical and mental wellbeing of the elderly in recent years, coupled with supportive policies, has positioned the promotion of music therapy as a vital pathway towards achieving comprehensive healthcare. Scientific research has confirmed that music therapy effectively improves the emotional state of the elderly, enhances social interaction, and promotes mental wellbeing. Consequently, the promotion of music therapy in China is particularly necessary.

3.2 Feasibility

China possesses a profound musical cultural heritage, providing a unique cultural foundation for the promotion of mu-

sic therapy. For instance, the integration of traditional musical forms such as Kunqu opera, Qinqiang opera, Peking opera, the Sainam dance, folk songs and ballads from the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia region, Fujian Nanyin, Chaozhou zither music, and Yangko opera with modern music therapy techniques facilitates greater acceptance and implementation of music therapy among elderly populations. Moreover, as the training system for professional music therapists gradually matures, an increasing number of specialists are equipped to deliver music therapy services to the elderly. These practitioners not only conduct personalised musical interventions but also engage in interdisciplinary collaboration with medical and care teams, thereby enhancing the therapeutic efficacy of music therapy. The implementation of music therapy in care homes, community health centres, and residential care facilities has demonstrated favourable social and economic benefits, further validating its feasibility and sustainable development potential within China[9][10][11][12][13].

3.3 Innovation

3.3.1 Addresses the psychological needs of the elderly in contemporary society by introducing music therapy to this demographic

The growth of China's ageing population has led to unequal distribution of social resources, triggering societal conflicts and fostering discrimination against the elderly. As the elderly age, they increasingly experience loneliness, diminished self-worth, neglected emotional needs, declining physical function, and social tensions, all contributing to psychological issues. This state of suboptimal mental health carries risks of triggering mental disorders and may manifest somatic symptoms. This project recognises the neglect of the elderly's emotional needs and the resulting lack of humanistic care, addressing these through music therapy.

3.3.2 Raising public awareness of music therapy's importance for the elderly

By integrating music therapy with elderly care services, we aim to introduce it into communities and care homes. This promotes the application scope of music therapy and enhances public recognition.

3.3.3 Enhancing services for the elderly through interdisciplinary integration

Music therapy integrates knowledge from medicine, psychology, musicology and other disciplines, forming a cross-disciplinary therapeutic model. This convergence not only enriches treatment approaches but also enhances the scientific rigour and effectiveness of services for the elderly.

3.3.4 Cutting-edge nature

It can better promote social development and harmony. Introducing music therapy into social groups helps advance healthcare standards. When relevant institutions integrate music therapy with elderly care services, they can deliver superior programmes while also stimulating economic growth.

4. Conclusion

This study focused on a cohort of elderly individuals aged 65 to 75. During the experimental process, therapeutic activities were conducted on-site at two distinct care homes. Following three months of treatment, it was evident that participants experienced enhanced social engagement and reduced social isolation through various music-based interventions. Furthermore, the incorporation of meditation and rhythmic movement exercises contributed to improvements in chronic physical pain. This demonstrates that music therapy holds potential efficacy in alleviating social isolation and chronic pain among the elderly.

In summary, music therapy — a specialised service integrating music with healthcare — is experiencing steady growth both domestically and internationally. With increasing demand for mental health and holistic healthcare services, alongside rapid technological advancements and ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration between emerging technologies and scientific theories, music therapy demonstrates significant social benefits in elderly care services, proving both important and feasible. However, to fully realise its potential, continuous exploration and innovation remain essential. It is anticipated that music therapy will soon become accessible to households across China.

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