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Paradigm in laughter therapy on physical and mental health of elderly: A narrative review

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Abstract

Objective: The objective of this study to overview literature related to the effect of various forms of laughter therapy on physical and mental health in the elderly and summarizes the finding of literature from searches of computerized databases like Pub Med, Google scholar.

Method: The review analyses concept of laughter therapy, the importance of laughter therapy in the elderly, and its association with various health-related benefits in the elderly.

Result: After reviewing available literature in full text and the English language, finding of most of the studies shows positive effects or null effects of laughter therapy on various physiological and psychological benefits in the elderly. However, null effects from laughter therapy on health benefits were found to be rare.

Conclusion: Laughter therapy, in conjunction with other preventive and therapeutic interventions, is an outstanding prescription for getting better physical and mental health in the elderly.

Keywords: laughter therapy, laughter yoga, mental health, physical health elderly

Introduction

The world continues to experience a sustained change in the age structure of the population, driven by increasing life expectancy. There is a shift in the distribution of a country's population towards older ages is known as population aging. Population aging is a global phenomenon^[1]. World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that the elderly population aged 60 years and above is expected to total 2 billion by 2050^[2]. Additional years in life provide the chance to pursue new activities or maintenance of the previous level of activities of the elderly. The extend of these opportunities depends mainly on the "Health" domain of individuals^[2]. "Health" is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease^[3]. "Aging" is a physiologic process that affects all of our body systems^[4]. A Decline in various physiological and psychological functions with aging are directly or indirectly affects the quality of life, subject wellbeing, and physical as well as mental health of a person^[4]. A variety of therapeutic strategies have been implemented to promote physical and mental health and quality of life in the elderly. Among which the laughter-based intervention is an important strategy that has been recommended by experts for health promotion.

Human emotions like uneasiness, discouragement, depression, delight, and laughter, significantly influence mental and physical health cycles. Laughter is a universal sign of happiness^[5]. Laughter and laughter-based intervention have the potential to be both preventive and therapeutic. Laughter seems to have a significant impact both on the mind and the body. Laughter therapy boosts the immune system, preventing illness, and is used as a treatment in the healing process by reducing stress. As a result, it is an excellent remedy for mind-body wellness^[6].

From a therapeutic point of view, Laughter-inducing therapies come in different formats. Spontaneous laughter therapy typically includes laughter exercises with humor such as humorous video or comic. Simulated laughter is self-induced laughter therapy that is triggered by oneself at will, with no specific reason. Others are induced and pathological laughter^[7]. With above mention Laughter therapy, 'Spontaneous' (humorous) and 'Simulated' (non-humorous) laughter have been applied in a wide range of settings to improve health and well-being^[7].

The purpose of this review was to first identify, examine, and conclude the literature on laughter in a variety of health-related fields in the elderly.

Materials and Methods

PUBMED, PUBMED CENTRAL, and GOOGLE SCHOLAR were used to conduct a computer-based literature search. The keywords "laughter yoga", "laughter therapy", "Health" and "elderly" were used. Relevant full-

text articles published in English between 2011 and 2020 were screened and included. Laughter intervention in the health domain of the elderly was the main focus of the review article. Editorials, Commentaries, Discussion papers, and Conference abstracts were not considered. After the screening through articles, Characteristic of the reviewed article was summarized in table 1. All studies have examined the effect of laughter based therapy on health domain of elderly.

Table 1: Summary table of reviewed articles

Author/ year of publication	Aim/purpose	Research design	Sample characteristics	Outcome measures	Key findings
Shahidi <i>et al.</i> /2011	compare the effectiveness of Laughter Yoga and group exercise therapy on depression and increasing life satisfaction in older adult women	RCT	70 Depressed women with an age range of 60–80 years of age.	Yesavage Geriatric depression scale (GDS) Diener life satisfaction scale (LSS):	Laughter Yoga is at least as effective as group exercise program in improvement of depression
Weinberg M <i>et al.</i> /2014	To examine the effect of a single LY class on the psychological well-being.	pilot study	44 participants with a mean age of 58.86 (SD = 14.12). Most were female (72.7%).	General Life Satisfaction (GLS): Subjective Well-being (SWB): The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS)	LY shows promise as an effective intervention to temporarily increase well-being.
Dhivagar <i>et al.</i> /2016	Assess the Effectiveness of Laughter Therapy on Stress and Anxiety among Elder	experimental study	60 elderly both male and female	Modified Cohen Perceived Stress Scale and Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale	Laughter therapy was effective in reduction of Stress and Anxiety among elder
Hirosaki M <i>et al.</i>	Study on Laughter as a predictor of subsequent disability in community-dwelling elderly in Japan.	prospective study	162 community-dwelling people aged 65 years	Psychological factors, medical conditions, and self-ratings of frequency of laughter (FOL).	Low frequency of laughter is associated with functional decline in community-dwelling elderly in Japan.
Ellis JM <i>et al.</i> /2017	evaluate the effects of a laughter yoga activities (LY) program for older people	Experimental study	29 older participants (23 female,5 male)	The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS): General Happiness Scale (GHS): blood pressure and pulse	The potential for using LY to improve mood and lower blood pressure of older people

Summary of Reviewed Articles

Laughter therapy and Mental Health of the elderly

This review evaluated the recent literature on the effect of laughter therapy on mental health domains like stress, anxiety, depression, sleep quality in the elderly. Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution to her or his community.

Effects of laughter therapy on various psychological functions by a significant decrease in salivary CgA level and a significant increase in serum serotonin level, parasympathetic system^[8]. The analysis indicated that LT has the following therapeutic effects on mental health: improving positive emotion, stimulating cognition, reducing stress, improving positive coping, and improving interpersonal relationships^[9].

Shahidi *et al.* (2011) conducted a study on Laughter yoga versus group exercise programs in elderly depressed women. Study findings showed that Laughter Yoga is as effective as a group exercise program in the improvement of depression and life satisfaction of elderly depressed women^[10].

Weinberg M, Hammond T *et al.* (2014) conducted a study on the impact of laughter yoga on subjective well-being, and the study indicates that laughter yoga sessions were

improved positive emotions and reduce the level of anxiety and stress^[11].

Dhivagar S *et al.* (2016) did a study to assess the effectiveness of Laughter Therapy on Stress and anxiety among the elderly of Puducherry. They found that Laughter therapy was effective in the reduction of Stress and Anxiety among the elderly^[12].

Laughter Therapy and Physical Health of Elderly

Physical health is defined as the well-being of the body and the proper functioning of an individual's organism.

This review examined the most recent literature on the effects of laughter therapy on Physical health domains like blood pressure, general health, well-being, quality of life, pain reduction, Functional level, physical/functional fitness level.

Hirosaki M *et al.* (2011) did a study on Laughter as a predictor of subsequent disability in community-dwelling elderly in Japan. A 1-year prospective study was conducted among 162 community-dwelling people aged 65 years with measures that included functional ability, socio-demographic and psychological factors, medical conditions, and self-ratings of frequency of laughter (FOL). They suggested that low frequency of laughter is associated with functional decline in community-dwelling elderly in Japan^[13].

Ellis JM *et al.* (2017) did a study on Laughter yoga activities for older people living in residential aged care homes. The finding of the study suggested that LY was significantly improved mood and lower blood pressure of older people [14].

Conclusion

Laughter techniques can be easily implemented and cost-effectively used in traditional clinical settings to improve the well-being of patients.

The existing literature on laughter is convincing that laughter has various positive physiological and psychological effects on the body. Literature indicates that the effect of laughter therapy on psychological benefits is far greater than the effect on physiological benefits. There is enough evidence to suggest that laughter therapy has numerous positive, quantifiable benefits in physiological, spiritual, and psychological domains. The adverse impact of LT was identified to be very minor, and the weakness can be mitigated. Following a thorough investigation into the effects of LT on health, it was determined that LT has more therapeutic effects than negative effects on health.

Laughter therapy, in conjunction with other preventive and therapeutic interventions, is an outstanding prescription for getting better physical and mental health in the elderly.

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