Effects of Art Therapy on Cognition, Depression, and Quality of Life in Elderly

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Purpose: The study attempted to examine whether the group art therapy using a collage medium and reminiscence therapy prevented or reversed dementia, prevented depression, and improved the quality of life of elderly women at high risk for dementia in community public health centers. Methods: As a quasi-experimental study with a non-equivalent control group, this study used a pre-post design. The subjects consisted of a random sample of women over 65 years of age who had been registered as being at high-risk for dementia at the Public Health Center of the G City, and the Dementia Support Center. Of these elders, 30 were assigned to the experimental group and 33 to the control group. The intervention was conducted twice a week for 5 weeks. x²-test, t-test, Wilcoxon test were used to analyze the data. Results: After the program, cognitive function, depression, and quality of life were significantly better in the experimental group than in the control group. Conclusion: The group art therapy can be utilized in community-based nursing practices by identifying and registering those who are at high risk for dementia. The results should prove useful when designing future intervention strategies targeting elderly individuals residing in communities.

Key Words: Art therapy, Cognition, Depression, Quality of life, Elders

INTRODUCTION

Longer life expectancy has resulted in a rapidly increasing elderly population who suffer from decreased cognition that leads to disorientation. There were about the number of 400,000 people with dementia in the last year in Korea and nearly 700,000 people with dementia people are expected to occur in 2020 (National Statistic Organization Office, 2012). Thus, cognitive disorders will continue to constitute a heavy burden and increase the need for continuing care. Dementia reflects the loss of a wide range of nerve cells, and these changes result in cognitive dysfunction (Jeong, 2007). Cognitive dysfunction, in turn, is associated with depression and reduced quality of life. Comijs, Jonker, Beekman, and Deeg (2001) observed 641 people over 70 years of age...
for 3 years and found an association between lower levels of cognition and more severe depression. Their study concluded that dementia rendered it difficult to maintain an adequate quality of life. Hwang, Lim, and Lee (2009) administered the Mini-Mental State Examination-Korean version (MMSE-K) to 3,012 people aged over 65 years who were categorized into three groups: normal individuals, individuals at risk for dementia, and individuals with dementia. The group with lower levels of cognitive ability showed a higher rate of depression.

Finally, dementia support centers located in health centers nationwide serving individuals over 60 years of age have used the Korean dementia screening questionnaire and the mini-mental state examination in the Korean version of the assessment package issued by the Consortium to Establish a Registry for Alzheimer's Disease as dementia screening tests. Using the same three classifications, they found that people with dementia received a referral to a hospital for treatment but that no services were offered to the high-risk group. Elderly people in the community need rehabilitation to prevent the exacerbation of cognitive dysfunction and to improve cognition.

Although it is difficult to identify the cause of dementia and despite the fact that treatment for this disorder remains limited, we do know that cognitive rehabilitation (e.g., art, music, horticultural, and other therapies) used to treat elderly individuals with dementia living in senior homes slows the progression of their cognitive impairment. However, the effect of such activities on high-risk elderly individuals living in the community has never been measured. Art therapy helps people to express their inner feelings, and activities using artistic media prevent cognitive impairment. Yet, artistic activities such as painting, drawing, sculpting, and so on require creativity and can be difficult for elderly individuals. However, collages enable individuals to express their feelings quickly and easily. It has been reported that the creation of collages is an effective way for elderly individuals with cognitive impairments to form images with relative ease (Sezaki & Bloomgarden, 2000). Reminiscence therapy for elderly people stimulates their memories and emotions, thereby improving their cognition and helping to increase their self-awareness by allowing them to relive previous happy experiences, thereby overcoming depression and improving their quality of life.

Art therapy and reminiscence therapy help elderly people who have trouble communicating to recall the past and recover concepts of space and time. It has been reported that the interaction between group members constitutes a very important intervention for people with dementia who lack interpersonal relationships (Sherman, 1996). 10 times of cognitive behavior therapy intervention was an effective nursing intervention to decrease the level of mental health problems of elderly (Lee, Lee, Jhoo, & Youn, 2002).

Art therapy using collages and reminiscences with people at high risk for dementia relies on user-friendly materials, recollections of happy memories, and group interactions to enhance awareness and facilitate cognition. Additionally, the effects of stimulating memories and emotions are persistent, which is important given that people at high risk for dementia become increasingly isolated if they do not intentionally socialize with others, leading to a more rapid exacerbation of symptoms. We studied the effects of group art therapy using a collage medium and reminiscence therapy in women at high risk for dementia who are living in the community.

1. Aim

The purpose of the study was to examine whether group art therapy using a collage medium and reminiscence therapy prevented or reversed dementia, prevented depression, and improved the quality of life of elderly women at high risk for dementia in community public health centers.

2. Hypothesis

- Hypothesis 1: Those participating in art therapy using a collage medium and engaging in a reminiscence group would differ in cognition from those in a control group.
- Hypothesis 2: Those participating in art therapy using a collage medium and engaging in a reminiscence group would differ in terms of depression from those in a control group.
- Hypothesis 3: Those participating in art therapy using a collage medium and engaging in a reminiscence group would differ in terms of their quality of life from those in a control group.

3. Definition of Terms

1) Elderly individuals at high risk for dementia

This group consisted of women older than 65 years who registered with the Dementia Support Center of the Public Health Center and who had normal intelligence.