A Study of the Effect of Reminiscence Therapy on Alleviating Negative Emotions and Improving Mental Health of the Elderly in the Context of COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The novel coronavirus 2019(COVID-19) sweeping the world threatens people's physical and mental well-being, and the elderly tend to have more serious negative emotions due to their poor resistance level and they are more likely to believe rumors, which leads to a decline in their mental health. In this research, I try to explore whether reminiscence therapy, which has achieved good results in many clinical fields, can play a positive role in alleviating the negative emotions of the elderly and improving their mental health, and hence, help the community or within the family to seek protection for the elderly and then help them to properly maintain a good psychological well-being to face the pandemic.

Keywords: Elderly; COVID - 19; Negative emotions; Reminiscence therapy

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) around the world has constituted a global emergency. The crowd is generally susceptible to COVID-19, and the proportion of critical patients and the mortality rate of elderly patients are high, which may lead to a series of negative emotions and even psychological problems in the elderly. Due to the impact of the pandemic, there are so many changes in our lifestyle, people's psychological state has become unstable. COVID-19 has the characteristics of longer incubation period, atypical clinical symptoms, easily being misdiagnosed, and long isolation period. In addition, the current information dissemination is relatively fast, and it is difficult for the public, especially the elderly, to distinguish the authenticity of the information.

The elderly rarely pay attention to their mental state awareness, which leads to a continuous decline in their mental health. Reminiscence therapy (RT), as one of the effective care methods in nursing practice, can help people increase their sense of well-being, improve their quality of life and adapt to the existing environment by reviewing past events, emotions and thoughts[1], and its positive effects on cognition, emotion, and mental state have also been widely concerned and affirmed by scholars at home and abroad[2,3]. The purpose of this research was to explore the application of reminiscence therapy to relieve the anxiety and depression of elderly patients during the pandemic, and to explore the effect of this method on relieving the negative emotions and improving their mental health.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Origins of negative emotions in the elderly during the pandemic

Relevant studies have shown that widowed, unmarried, and single-living elderly are more prone to negative emotions such as anxiety and depression[4], and Huang[5] presented that there is no statistical significance in the stratified comparison of anxiety among relatives with or without observation, suspected or confirmed cases, which is inconsistent with the negative correlation between education level and anxiety in the elderly-related research, or the positive correlation with retirement, chronic diseases, etc.[6]. Therefore, one of the possible reasons for the negative emotions of the elderly during the COVID-19 is the government's appeal to stay at home during this special period, which means reduction of activities, limitation of space, and fear of the progress of the pandemic.

In addition, during the novel coronavirus 2019, the pandemic progressed rapidly, and the rolling broadcast of

media was also the reason for affecting the emotional changes of the elderly. Huang's survey[5] results show that the top 5 reasons why the level of old people's mental health decline are unable to travel normally (55.25%), unable to buy protective equipment (47.1 2%), worrying about himself (42.71%) and his family being infected (30.93%) and lack of related knowledge about prevention (30.85%).

Low frequency of family communication is also an important factor in anxiety and depression. Elderly people with a variety of chronic diseases may have more problems with their own health during long-term home quarantine, which increase the corresponded psychological burden [7]. The participation of family members in anti-pandemic activities, even in communities of low-risk areas, will increase the psychological distress of the elderly, that is, worry about the health of family members, which highlights the importance of mutual communication with family members.

2.2 Reasons for the decline in mental health of the elderly during the pandemic

When the pandemic hits, the sense of security of the elderly decreases, and they are more likely to panic and worry about whether their family members or themselves will be infected. Empty-nest elderly are worried about the dangers of their children who are far away from home. The elderly often feel helpless due to the perceived decline in their ability to care for themselves and the stress brought about by the pandemic.

Some elderly people will always pay attention to their physical condition, following various reports including some unconfirmed news; forwarding all information related to the pandemic in the Moments and WeChat groups, and repeatedly discussing the progress of the pandemic with their family members which would cause deep worry and fear.

On the other hand, some elderly people make judgments based on their existing experience. They often filter facts and scientific data from their personal cognitive system. Some people think that their time is running out and it doesn't matter whether they are infected or not, but they ignore the public health impact of the pandemic.

If the nervousness, panic, helplessness and other emotions of the elderly cannot be effectively relieved, they may experience obvious anxiety and depression: repeatedly worrying about whether they are sick, repeating inspections and disinfection, and being afraid of people around them coughing or sneezing. Those who have suffered from depression and anxiety may experience fluctuations or aggravation of their condition if they do not receive effective psychological counseling[8].

2.3 Reminiscence therapy

"Nostalgia" is an important treatment technique in the casework of social service for the elderly. It mainly helps the elderly to strengthen positive life experience by guiding the elderly to review the relevant experiences and memories of positive events in their past lives, and to achieve self-esteem, which may let the elderly feel self-affirming and self-worthy [9].

Reminiscence therapy helps people to increase their well-being and satisfaction with their present life by reviewing past events, emotions and thoughts [2,3]. Nostalgia is a psychological phenomenon that is commonly used in psychotherapy for the elderly. As a psycho-social treatment method, reminiscence therapy has been widely used in the intervention of senile depression, stroke and senile dementia in foreign countries to help the elderly improve self-understanding, enhance self-esteem, social adaptation and reduce depression. As scientifically proved that, effective psychological intervention can reduce the depression and loneliness of the elderly, enhance their well-being, and improve the mental health of the elderly.

2.4 Advantages of reminiscence therapy in alleviating negative emotions and improving mental health of the elderly

The use of reminiscence therapy in geriatric services in social work has great advantages compared to the use of traditional medicine in the treatment. On the basis of value, social workers mainly meet the needs of serving clients, following the principles of helping others and clients' self-determination, emphasizing the advantages and uniqueness of individuals and the environment. Following instructions for treatment, which means in practice, social workers connect multiple resources to achieve service goals and provide solutions to clients through professional practice methods, while in traditional medical models, experts directly diagnose the main reason of an individual's problem and propose a general treatment plan. While using reminiscence therapy to solve the same situation, instead, social workers pay more attention to progress, discussing the solution to the problem with the client, discussing the formulation of goals, etc. They respect the client's ideas, while the traditional medical model emphasizes the authority of experts and ignores personal initiative and creativity. It can be seen that the role of reminiscence therapy in social work seems to be greater than that in traditional treatment, and it is more worthy of research and exploration[10].

3. RESEARCH PROPOSAL

3.1 Study I: The proportion of the elderly with severe negative emotions and poor mental health

3.1.1 Purpose

On the basis of investigating the proportion of the elderly with severe negative emotions and poor mental health, the samples who meet the experimental conditions are selected to prepare for the subsequent intervention of reminiscence therapy.

3.1.2 Research subjects

An online questionnaire survey was conducted among middle-aged and elderly people in Wuhan to study the psychological stress and mood of the elderly in the context of the pandemic, and to provide a basis for the intervention of reminiscence therapy to maintain the mental health of middle-aged and elderly people. Criteria for recruitment: (1) aged between 60 and 75; (2) be able to cooperate with online surveys; (3) valid feedback questionnaire.

3.1.3 Research methods

The self-developed scale collects the age, gender, marriage, education level and chronic disease status of the elderly, and forms a QR code through the questionnaire and sends it to the mobile phone of the elderly or their family members through WeChat. The elderly who cannot operate the mobile phone can be represented by their family members.

After demographic data included gender, age, marital status, occupation, COVID-19 infection or exposure, self-assessment of physical health, and level of concern about the pandemic were collected, the self-assessment of physical health is revealed through a score for the health of one's own body, which is divided into four grades. The level of worrying about the pandemic was revealed by the level of worrying about oneself or family members being infected, ranging from not worried to very worried, divided into 5 levels[11].

Mental Health Scale Assessment. (1) Mental Health Self-Assessment Questionnaire, which is used to reflect the stress situation of the respondents. If the score is ≥ 8, it is considered that there is a certain stress response and needs psychological crisis assistance. (2) Patient Health Questionnaire-9, which reflects the depressive mood of the respondents in the past 2 weeks. The higher the score, the more severe the depressive symptoms. (3) Generalized anxiety disorder scale, which reflects the anxiety of the respondents. The higher the score, the more severe the anxiety symptoms. When the cut-off value is greater than or equal to 10 points, it is helpful for the diagnostic screening of anxiety disorders, with good sensitivity and specificity[12-13].

3.1.4 Expected results

According to the evaluation, select the samples required for study 2.

3.2 Study 2: A Controlled experiment on interventional reminiscence therapy

3.2.1 Purpose

To explore the effect of reminiscence therapy on alleviating negative emotions and improving mental health of the elderly during COVID-19.

3.2.2 Samples

The elderly with severe negative emotions and poor mental health of whom were evaluated by Study 1.

3.2.3 Research methods

Control group: receive routine care, such as diet management, medication guidance, daily life care, exercise intervention, etc., with regular telephone follow-up, asking about their exercise modes, types of meals, recent memory loss, etc., paying attention to their emotional state or psychological changes and keeping strengthen health promotion.

Observation group: on the basis of routine nursing, one-to-one reminiscence therapy was implemented, 50-60 minutes each time, twice a week, for a total of 5 weeks of intervention.

Healing process: conduct interviews—experts talk with the elderly and their family members to learn about the family background, hobbies, living habits, emotional state, life experience, physical and psychological needs, etc., and make detailed records to provide for reminiscence therapy intervention.

After that determine 5 nostalgic themes based on interview results, literature review, consultation with experts, etc., and use old photos, letters, diaries, video materials, books, award certificates and other meaningful objects provided by family members as a memory trigger. The detailed information would be shown in Table 1[14-16].

Table 1 The main content of the five treatments

TIME	THEME	CONTENT
Week 1	Hello, my friend	Focus on health education guidance, and invite the elderly and their families to join this research, mainly to introduce the knowledge about the COVID-19, and to enhance the elderly's understanding of it.
Week 2	The Good Time Wandered	Guide the elderly to recall the happy life they have experienced with their families and the difficulties and obstacles they have gone through together; recall the support, help, and inspiration that patients have given, as well as the company and care they have given.
Week 3	Once Upon a Good Memory	Guide the elderly to share old photos, old diaries, old movies, old songs, etc., recall the unforgettable memories of these old items, and tell the wonderful and interesting stories of the past.
Week 4	Confusion and Value	Guide the elderly to recall unforgettable, happy or interesting things in life, or talk about worrying and confusing things, talk about their ideal life and the most fulfilling things, and show self-worth and expectations for future life.
Week 5	How to say Goodbye	Make a summary and outlook. Drawing on the form of the TV program "The Reader", read a poem or text for the elderly, or say out loudly the words that they want to express but have not expressed, so that their inner feelings can be vented; finally, summarize the feelings of the activity and expectations for the future.

Obviously, before the intervention and 5 weeks after the intervention in the elderly, both groups were evaluated by the mental health level scale.

3.2.4 Expected results

Reminiscence therapy can effectively alleviate negative emotions and improve mental health of elderly people during COVID-19.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Hypothesis results

COVID - 19 outbreak of influence will lead to the elderly have more serious negative emotions, and resulting in a decline in their mental health, while using a reminiscence therapy can effectively alleviate the negative emotions of the elderly, and promote their psychological health, to ensure the elderly keep good state of mind to cope with stress life events during the outbreak of the pandemic.

4.2 Deficiencies in previous studies

At present, domestic reminiscence therapy mostly focuses on the treatment of partial clinical cases such as dementia, stroke, elderly cancer, and diabetes treatment. There are few studies on mental health and social service for the elderly in the field of social work, especially during the pandemic of the novel coronavirus. There also exists a lack of awareness of

general implementation of community work.

4.3 Future expectations

Through this research, this relatively blank area is preliminarily explored, and the role of reminiscence therapy and its universality in the field of social work for the elderly are introduced. By summarizing the reasons for the negative emotions and declining mental health of the elderly during the COVID-19, reminiscence therapy was introduced for its particularities (non-clinical symptoms, low awareness of their own mental state, etc.).

Future researches could make the community or family as a unit, pay attention to the mental health of the elderly in this special period. With these efforts, we may be able to avoid the tragedy like suicide among the elderly who are affected by negative emotions.

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