

Art for Ages: The Benefits of Musical Experience on the Health and Wellbeing in Nursing Homes



Carla Pedrazzani,* Stefano Cavalli,* Paola Di Giulio,* Hubert Einholzer,** Paolo Paolantonio,** Daisy Fancourt,*** Aaron Williamon***

*Department of Business Economics, Health and Social Care, SUPSI - **University School of Music, SUPSI - ***Centre for Performance Science, Royal College of Music London

Background

Listening to music has been shown to play a significant role in many older adults' lives particularly as a mean of self-regulating wellbeing and giving meaning to life experiences.

Recent studies have shown that music learning can increase the frequency of health promoting behaviors, lead to improved self-satisfaction and reports of overall health and facilitate enhanced social interactions. However, the field remains under-researched.

Objectives

✓ To assess whether group music making improves physical and mental wellbeing and affects biological responses of older adults.

Methods

Clinical trial, not randomized.

Residents willing to take part in music activities, participated in 10 music sessions, one group focused on rhythm and the other on singing. Participants involved in other activities of the nursing homes acted as controls.

✓ Music questionnaire, measurements of quality of life (SF-12), depression (GDS scale) and loneliness (De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale) have been administered at baseline and after the last session.

✓ Saliva samples have been collected to measure stress hormones levels before and after one session.

For the analysis, psychological data were compared using repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) across time and between groups.

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Music sessions have been held - with live singing and playing simple instruments but also sticks, cups or graters - by the master students and musicians of the University School of Music. They were well attended by the residents, with pleasure and minimum drop out.



«I was really looking forward to Friday... It has been a wonderful experience and I am glad to have done it!»

«I liked everything, it has been really wonderful, also learn to play castanets, as I can't play drums... I could play!..»

Results

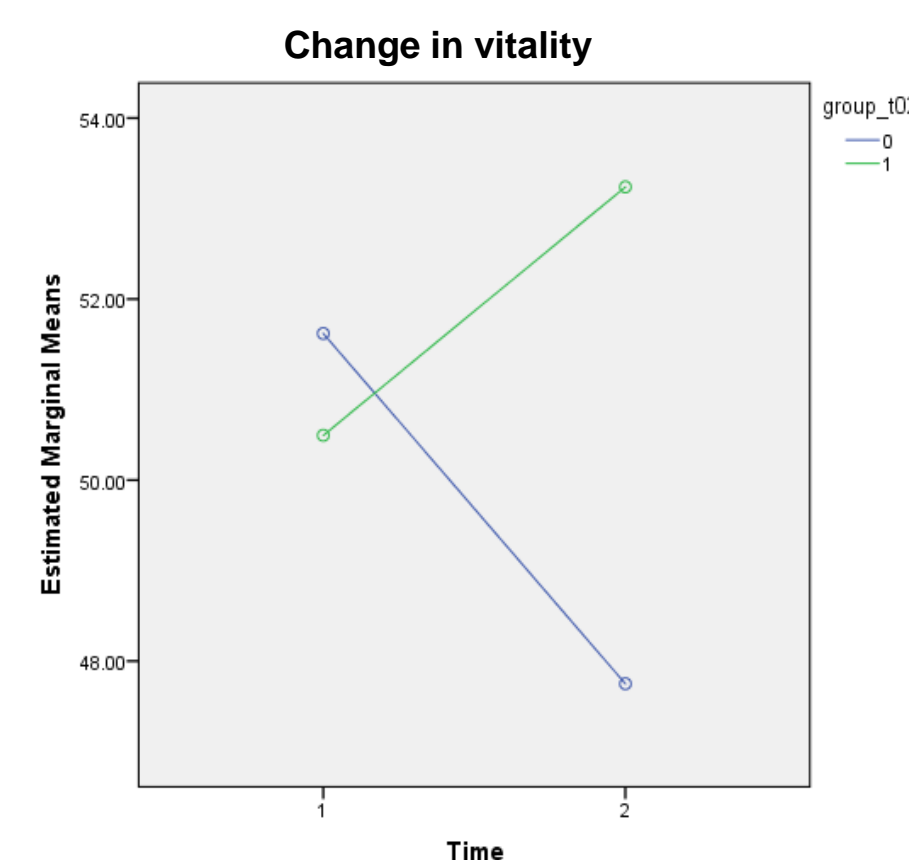
Demographics

87 participants were included in the analyses with an average age of 86.6 years (SD±6.6), 72 residents were women (83.9%). 44 participants were in the final music group (29 rhythm and 15 singing) and 43 in the final non-music group.

At baseline, there were no meaningful demographic differences between those in the music and the non-music groups, including in age, length of nursing home stay or distribution of women and men. There were also no significant differences between groups in terms of previous activities in nursing homes, and specifically in terms of participation in music activities.

SF-12 General Health scale

There was a significant difference between groups in the changes over 10 weeks in vitality subscale, but no significant difference in physical role limitation, bodily pain, general health, social functioning, emotional role limitation, and mental health subscales.



A one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference of mean scores on SF-12 vitality subscale between groups, with the non-music group (blue) decreasing and the music group (green) increasing in vitality after the 10-weeks intervention ($F_{1,70}=5.42$, $p=0.023$).

The improvement in vitality was uncorrelated with baseline musical listening or singing habits, or attitudes towards music, suggesting that benefits were felt by participants regardless of prior musical experience.

Geriatric Depression Scale

When participants were dichotomized into "not depressed" (scores of 0 or 1) and "depressed" (scores > 2), there was a near-significant difference in depression between the two groups, with a slight decrease among the music group ($M=-0.04$, $SD\pm 0.60$) and a slight increase among the non-music group ($M=0.38$, $SD\pm 0.88$) ($F_{1,48}=3.85$, $p=0.056$).

De Jong Loneliness Scale

There was a smaller increase in loneliness across the 10 weeks in the music than the non-music group, but an ANOVA comparing changes across time and between groups revealed that this was not significant ($F_{1,65}=0.31$, $p=0.58$).

Conclusions

Art for Ages has demonstrated the importance of music to the lives and wellbeing of older adults in nursing homes. Despite many activities being available to the nursing home residents, they clearly felt a need for greater musical provision.

Our targeted 10-weeks music programs show promise for improving vitality, a lack of which has been linked in previous research to premature mortality. Our study offers several promising avenues through which older adults (and their careers) can employ music to enhance health and wellbeing.

