



Evaluation of the effectiveness of painting therapy on health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety in the elderly

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this study was to determine the effectiveness of painting therapy on health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety in the elderly. **Methods:** The research method was quasi-experimental with pre-test-post-test design with experimental group and control group with a follow-up test period. From the statistical population of the elderly living in nursing homes in Tehran in 2021, 30 samples were selected by convenience sampling and randomly divided into two experimental groups and a control group. Painting therapy was applied for ten sessions for the experimental group. The required findings were collected using the Health Anxiety Questionnaire (Salkovskis & Warwick, 2002), Loneliness (Dehshiri et al., 2007) and Templer Death Anxiety (1970) and were analyzed using repeated measures analysis of variance was analyzed. **Results:** Findings showed that the mean scores of post-tests and follow-up test of health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety in the experimental group decreased and the results of repeated measures analysis of variance showed that painting therapy intervention to reduce health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety in the elderly is effective ($p < 0.001$). **Conclusion:** Therefore, it is suggested that painting therapy intervention be used to reduce health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety in the elderly. **Keywords:** *Elderly, Health Anxiety, Loneliness, Death Anxiety, Painting Therapy*

Introduction

One of the most important changes in the social structure of societies in the 21st century is the increase in the elderly population (Thakor & Han, 2021). Old age is one of the critical stages in human psychological evolution, which brings certain physical, cognitive and social changes (Janek et al., 2018). Aging is also a part of the growth process, man is getting old and every step he takes leads him to old age and death. The world is witnessing an increase in the population of the elderly under the shadow of scientific advances, increasing well-being and health. Estimates indicate that by 2030, the world's elderly population will increase from 9% to 16% and in Iran from 5.6% to 17.5% (Amini Rastabi et al., 2013). According to these statistics, the neglect of this age group is inevitable, and it seems necessary to consider and plan to meet the needs and improve the quality of life of the elderly (Zanjiran et al., 2015).

In addition to health anxiety, the feeling of loneliness among the elderly is one of the psychosocial problems that cause other problems as well. Decreasing physical strength and health, the death of loved ones puts them at risk of isolation, and for many elderly people, loneliness at the end of life is an unpleasant and exhausting phenomenon (Morte et al., 2018). Research shows that deprivation of social activities makes the elderly susceptible to depression and causes them to feel more lonely (Isik et al., 2020).

Also, with increasing age and its complications, death anxiety is another mental issue of the elderly. Death anxiety is one of the most common mental health issues of the elderly, because this period is full of all kinds of feelings of deficiencies and inabilities (Kholuti et al., 1400). Death anxiety is present in most people's lives and it varies based on age, gender, mental state and religious beliefs. Worries about death may negatively affect quality of life (Sinoff, 2017).

Various treatments have been implemented in the field of improving the psychological condition of the elderly, including reality therapy, meaning therapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Among other treatments that can be effective in improving mental health and enriching the lives of the elderly, is painting therapy (Khadar et al., 2013). In fact, one of the intervention methods for the elderly that has been of interest recently is art therapy (Siaska et al., 2018).

One of the most important branches of art therapy is painting therapy. Painting is the self-motivated drawing of images that provides opportunities for non-verbal communication and expression (Jones et al., 2018), and painting therapy is not meant to teach painting, but rather to provide opportunities for a person to freely express his feelings, emotions, needs, and even his knowledge through colors and lines. Painting and visual arts in general are used as a tool for projecting, emotional discharge, presenting thoughts and showing feelings, conflicts and inner desires.

According to the above-mentioned materials, elderly people need special attention in the field of health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety. In addition, the researches conducted in this field are few in the country and the research gap in the field of the effectiveness of painting therapy on health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety is becoming more and more visible, and the combination of these factors caused the researcher to address this issue. According to the mentioned materials, the main problem of the research was:

What is the effect of painting therapy on health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety of the elderly?

Method

This research is an applied and semi-experimental research with a pre-test-post-test design with an experimental group and a control group along with a follow-up test period. The statistical population of the present study included all the elderly living in nursing homes in Tehran city in 2021. From the aforementioned population, 30 samples were selected as available through a call and randomly replaced in two experimental groups and control group; The criteria for entering the research were being at least 60 years old, not participating in another treatment course at the same time, having acceptable hearing and vision, not suffering from psychiatric disorders and cognitive disorders such as dementia and Alzheimer's, having the desire and consent to participate in the research, not being addicted to any drugs and stimulants, and not suffering from incurable or incurable diseases. The criteria for withdrawing from the research were absence of more than two sessions in therapeutic intervention, taking drugs related to nerves and psyche, withdrawing from participating in the therapeutic course.

Results

The average of health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety of the experimental group (painting therapy) in the post-test and follow-up test has decreased compared to the pre-test, and there is no noticeable difference between the post-test and the follow-up test; But in the scores of the three times of the control group, the difference was very slight.

Wilks's multivariate lambda test indicates the significance of the variance of the interaction between group and time in all three variables ($P < .01$). According to the effect size in health anxiety variables 0.81, health anxiety variables 0.77 and health anxiety variables 0.41, it is clear that the effect of painting therapy intervention on reducing health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety is positive and significant. In order to compare the results in the test phases (pre-test, post-test and follow-up test), pairwise comparison was used.

There is a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test averages, pre-test and follow-up averages ($P < .01$). So that the mean of the post-test and follow-up is statistically lower than the mean of the pre-test in the variables of health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety. Also, there is no statistically significant difference between the average scores of the post-test and the average scores of the follow-up test, which indicates the stability of the results affected by the therapeutic intervention over time. Therefore, painting therapy has affected health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety, and this effect has remained stable over time.

Conclusion

This research was conducted with the aim of determining the effect of painting therapy on health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety of the elderly. The result of the research showed that painting therapy has a significant and lasting effect on improving health anxiety, loneliness and death anxiety of the elderly.

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