



## Uncovering gifts through rhythmic support: the music therapy with person with dementia

Mathew Joseph Kanamala

Head and Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, St. Joseph's College, Moolamattom, Kerala, India

### Abstract

The specific focus of this paper was to assess the possibilities and limitations of applying music therapy based on the affect the behavioural and cognitive problems or impair social and emotional function of the person with Dementia-studies have been included in this paper which state that music therapy is benefited for treating older people with dementia. Art therapy is widely using for dementia care and the various art therapies are helping the client for their physical, emotional, mental, social aesthetic, and spiritual improvement. Denny (1975) suggests that art therapy provides the meeting ground between the inner and outer worlds of the person by means of structured creative tasks. It enlightened the cognitive functioning, behaviour and social skills, motor skills, emotional and affective development and quality of life of the person with dementia.

**Keywords:** music therapy, person with dementia

### Introduction

For Mc Niff (1994) <sup>[6]</sup> the process of caring for the suffering soul takes place through the creative imagination through painting together, mediating collectively on the image and through the communication which the image evoke. Chaudhury (2003) <sup>[3]</sup> talks of tapping into people with dementia's long-term memories by using their time drawings to stimulate recall of their own homes. The main different types of arts are music, dance, drama, painting etc.

Music therapy can help the person with Dementia with communication- attention motivation and cognitive problems. Person with Dementia have identified many benefits of listening to music including emotional, social and daily life benefits, along with the formation of their own identity. Sherratt *et al.* (2004b) demonstrate the particular effectiveness of live music in increasing engagement and wellbeing for people with dementia.

More recent research suggests that music can increase patient's motivation and positive emotion. (Nayak, S *et al.*, 2000. Magee, W. L & Davidson, J. W 2002), Wheeler, B. L. *et al.* 2003).

Music is also used in Indian Vedic period as a therapeutic tool. Indian classical 'Ragas' have been claimed by Vedic science to have healing effects/ Raga work in music therapy because certain "Sound ways, depending on the way they are listened to or pronounced, are identified for having an impact in the way the neurological system work in the human body" (Davis *et al.*, 2008).

People with Dementia have difficulties with communication, behaviour and/ or social interaction due to their memory loss and cognitive impairment. Music therapy uses music and its elements to enable people to communicate and to express their feeling in a favourable manner. In this way music therapy addresses some of the core problems of the people with Dementia.

The active way of music therapy, is to ask the person with

dementia to participate in the music, playing instrument, singing with the therapist, or dancing as they like and just listening the old songs.

So music therapy is a controlled music experience that is used to enable healthy change his human behaviour. Each therapy session is carefully planned, carried out and evaluate to suit the particular needs of each patient. As far as dementia is concerned, studies have shown that music therapy has a considerable positive influence when used to treat person with dementia. Participating in music therapy gives the patients the opportunity to experience a wide range of feelings.

As part of Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Society of India (ARDSI) another has been organizing music therapy programme for our persons with dementia. In light of this there are many positive influences on music therapy.

### a) Development of Socio- emotional aspects

Music therapy helps to stop social withdrawal. The song or this musical instrument provides an initial point of contact between the demented person and the other individual by acting as an intermediary.

### b) Development of verbal and non- verbal communication

Music therapy improves the production of vocalization and speech, as well as stimulates the mental process of comprehending, conceptualizing and symbolizing

### c) Development of Emotional Fulfilment

In a music therapy session, a person with dementia has the freedom to behave in specific ways that allow them to discover and express themselves when they want and choose. Through music Therapy patient can attain self-improvement and have better quality of life, as well as change the state of mind. By listening music patient tend to become more relaxed and happy.

Music therapy stimulates creativity by acting channels of

neurons in the brain. Music therapy may help ease stress in the care giving patient with dementia as well as the stress of the patient. Music therapy is cost effective as it often increases accomplishment of management team goals and objectives. Research supports the effectiveness of music therapy in wide variety of healthcare and educational settings.

As Suggested by Hicks-Moore and Robinson (2008) [5], music therapy will reduce agitation of the person with dementia. Another possibility is that music therapy addresses the whole person and its is very easy to adapt new techniques according as the individual's needs.

Music therapy promotes goal oriented development of the individual. Chaudhary, H (2003) says that Long – Term art therapy can be used to calm anxiety, and bring relief from depression. Although participating in art therapy does not revive skills or rehabilitate cognitive functions, it is important in providing an opportunity to express feeling of self-worth and accomplishment.

Also according as Sixsmith, A and Gibson, G (2007) [8, 9], music can enable people to participate in activities that are enjoyable and personally meaningful. It is an important source of social cohesion and social contact; supports participation in various activities within and outside the house holds and provides a degree of empowerment and control over their everyday situations.

The above mentioned social cohesion and the social contract was the major result or outcome of the music therapy session in ARDSI respite centre. People can dance or sing music together without a feeling of inferiority or fear.

There is a very important question behind all the research work of music therapy for person with dementia. That is “How people may change under the influence of music?” Practically and theoretically viewed as a discipline and not only as a professional practice, music therapy encompasses a large inter disciplinary field of study around individual health relations. Within the new media technologies such as MP3, iPod and the new generations of music mobile phone, music therapy have a wide range of use for developing positive changes in the persons with dementia.

Interviews with few persons with dementia shown that there is a reflexive use of music in everyday life aimed at regulating both physical and mental balance. According as Indian culture arts and music was associated with Temples and churches in the early stages. People especially low income group or farmers used to enjoy this type of religious songs and art presentations. As an agent ARDSI Kottayam implemented music therapy with these kinds of religious songs. This made a very big impact rather than putting film or other songs. This kind of devotional songs act as the reminiscence method of treatment too. Here, music represents a source of faith and belief; it brings back memories of important events and persons in our life. Also it provides comforts, hopes as well as positive emotions and experiences. It allows dissociate from difficult emotions, guilt and thought thereby subduing anxieties by a cognitive reorientation, may result in physical relaxation, the initiation of a new bodily felt harmony.

Wlodarczyk KN (2007) [10] find out that statistically significant increase in spiritual well-being scores on music days using a spiritual well-being questionnaire after 40 minutes music therapy.

### **Benefits of music therapy according to practical experience**

1. Music therapy influences our mind before being changed it into thought and feeling.
2. It positively affects the higher cerebral centres of the brain.
3. Music therapy helps to identify an individual's personal harmony.
4. Music therapy is an important tool in the management of psychological and psychosomatic disorders.
5. It stimulates good vibrations in the nerves of the listeners.
6. It helps to rebuild a positive frame of mind including nostalgic feelings which makes the person with dementia better confidence.
7. It enhances the concentration and memory level of a pertinent.
8. Music therapy helps not only the persons affected with memory problems, but the care givers also benefiting in reducing the stress and anxiety.
9. Group music therapy helps to build a synergy among the inmates of respite care centres for persons with dementia.
10. Karnatic music that especially evoke sole and heart with its rhythmic setting interact with brain cells that link to memory.
11. When demented vaguely recollect a song they cherish an tune with it in their own phase and voice, a remarkable identity and self-respect is develop.

### **The possibilities**

There are various factors regarding the positive effects of music therapy for persons with dementia:

1. **The degree of familiarity of the song or music:** It automatically connected to the past of the person and will get a ‘Reminiscence’ effect. Also familiar songs attracts immediately with the person having memory problems or cognitive problems.
2. **The degree of liking of the person with dementia for that particular music:** Liking depends on the individual and that may develop particular sense of feeling or emotion. If he/she likes the music he will actively listen and enjoy.
3. **The memories related to the music:** All may have associated memories with particular song or music. If the memories are stronger with the music, the person with dementia will enjoy and attracted with the music and then develop positive feeling and enhance feelings of well-being. Sixsmith and Gibson (2007) [8, 9] suggested that the beneficial impacts of music feel into four categories: enhanced feelings of well-being, encouragement of valued activities, social interaction and increased senses of empowerment and control. For some of the person with dementia, music could be an effective way assisted in calming down emotions, find out suitable dues to the reality or impressing themselves. For some of them, music has become a very important part of their lives and treatments.

### **Limitations**

1. It must be very careful about the pitch and the volume of the music used for the therapy, to avoid negative effects.
2. If we use high volume, it may cause anxiety or pressure to

develop with the patient. Also a low pitch is advised to use.

3. If we use unfamiliar music, it may not contribute any impact on the individual. So the selection of the music is a primary and important one by a therapist.
4. Music therapy should be made particular to each individual, because what may be positively received by one person with dementia may be negative to another patient.

### **Conclusion**

Music always served everyday needs in our society. Music therapy contained the idea that music might become an essential and important factor in the treatment of person with dementia. It can be seen as an orientation towards our life, as a therapeutic tool, in addition to a healing profession. Music therapy intervention offers structure in improvement that can provide a framework further development of memory, learning and adaptability. So the application of music therapy has enhanced effect on person with dementia as well as their cares.

### **References**

1. Alzheimer Care Quarterly, (online journal) 4(2):119-124
2. Chaudhury H. Remembering Home through Art, 2003.
3. Chaudhury H. Remembering Home Through Art. Alzheimer's Care Quarterly. 2003; 4(2):119-124.
4. Denny J. Techniques for individual and group art therapy, in Ulman, E. and Dachinger, P. (eds) Art Therapy in Theory and Practice, New York, Schocken Books, 1975.
5. Hicks Moore S, Robinson B. Favorite music and hand massage: Two interventions to decrease agitation in residents with dementia, *Dementia*. 2008; 7(1):95-108.
6. McNiff S. Art as Medicine: creating a therapy of the imagination, London, Praeger Book, 1994.
7. Sherratt K, Thornton A, Hatton C. Emotional and behavioural responses to music in people with dementia: an observational study *Ageing and Mental Health*. 2004b; 8(3):233-241. (online) journal.
8. Sinsmith, A, Gibson G. Music and the well-being of people with dementia, *Ageing & Society*, 2007, 127-154.
9. Sinsmith A, Gibson G. Music and the well-being of people with dementia, *Ageing & Society*. 2007; 27:127-154.
10. Włodarczyk, The Florida State University, Big Bend Hospice USA, 2007.