Influence of massage on an elderly person's sense of wellness
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Introduction

Massage therapy has been used by many people all over the world for centuries to help improve individual wellbeing and Quality of Life (QoL). There has been an increasing number of studies on the benefits of massage which include reducing anxiety, relieving pain, preventing stress, and promoting healing. As we age, changes in physical and psychological wellbeing occur. The aim of this study was to see how massage therapy influences the wellness of independently living elderly people within Southland, New Zealand.

The study used a case series design with three participants. The inclusion criteria were people over 65 years old, willing to participate, able to communicate effectively in English, have received minimal massage before, and willing to give consent for the researcher to contact their doctor. Five massages were given over five weeks followed by a post intervention interview. Each session was 25-30 minutes long. Light to moderate pressure was used. Measures included the Old Persons Quality of Life (OPQOL) short questionnaire and a weekly log and wellness chart. Ethical approval was granted by the Southern Institute of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee.

Method

Demographics:
- 68 yr old female
- Full time work
- Very active
- Died recently

Two days post massage
- Good health

75 yr old male
- 14
- Initial pain during massage (short)
- 19
- Has arthritis, back pain & high blood pressure (controlled)
- Reduced pain and/or stiffness. There was a change in each
- Suffers from arthritis and high blood pressure (controlled)

14
- 17
- Good overall health

5
- Very active
- Died recently

Research Method

The key findings from this research project was all participants felt more relaxed after each session and had some experience
- Positive effects
- Relaxed
- Improved sleep
- Reduced pain
- Increased joint movement
- Better sleep quality

Positive effects
- Felt really good
- Complete reduction in night cramp

Positive effects
- Felt relaxed
- Improved sleep
- Felt relaxed
- Complete reduction in headaches
- Felt really good

Less pain
- Tinged from massage

Tinged from massage

The numbers refer to the week it was entered in the log.

Wellness chart

Throughout the three case studies it became evident that the participants regarded their physical quality of life as a key component of their overall wellness. Through the weekly log case A showed some change in their social, emotional, mental and physical wellness between weeks 1 and 5. Case B and C showed some change in emotional, mental and physical wellness. Massage can have an overall positive impact on health and quality of life; these findings show individual variability. Keir (2011) also states that massage therapy helps decrease stress, improve emotional and social well-being.

The OPQOL scores in cases A and C decreased by 8 and 5, whereas case B had an increase of 3. Initial scores were low which could have made it harder to see a change. A sleep measurement tool could be beneficial as improved sleep was an unexpected finding. It might also have been beneficial to find out what the participants believed of how massage therapy can affect their wellness.

One of the main limitations was the choice of participants. This study had a small sample size that was limited to the Southland region. Elderly people who are non-informal independent could be included in a wider study. One study suggests that elderly who have lived with a chronic illness for many years, are lonely or are struggling financially have a lower quality of life.6 These people might show a greater change in wellness. The Southland 'she'll be right attitude' may also have been a limitation, other geographical areas might show different results. The post intervention interview was a limitation, as the researcher was unsuccessful in gathering adequate qualitative data.

The key findings from this research project was all participants felt more relaxed after each session and had some experience of reduced pain and/or stiffness. There was a change in each participants wellness with minimal negative effects. Further research should address the limitations and include a larger sample size.

References