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Research Progress on Five-Element Music Therapy in Traditional Chinese Medicine: Postprint

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Five Elements Music Therapy is founded upon TCM theoretical principles, utilizing the pentatonic scale of Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zhi, and Yu to modulate the five zang-organs, thereby harmonizing qi and blood, regulating emotions, and achieving health cultivation and disease elimination. The therapy has been extensively applied in clinical practice, demonstrating favorable therapeutic efficacy in pain alleviation, anxiety mitigation, insomnia improvement, and other domains. This article provides a comprehensive review of the clinical application status of TCM Five Elements Music Therapy, with the objective of providing a reference for its further clinical investigation.

Full Text

Research Progress of Five Elements Music Therapy in Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Abstract

Five elements music therapy in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is grounded in TCM theory and utilizes the five-tone scale of Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zhi, and Yu to regulate the five viscera, thereby harmonizing qi and blood, regulating emotions, and promoting health to prevent and treat disease. This therapy is widely

applied in clinical practice and has demonstrated favorable effects in alleviating pain, relieving anxiety, and improving insomnia. This article summarizes the clinical application of TCM five elements music therapy to provide a reference for further clinical research on this therapeutic modality.

Keywords: Five elements music therapy of traditional Chinese medicine; pain; anxiety; insomnia; emotional nursing

1. Introduction

Five elements music therapy is a commonly employed emotional nursing intervention in TCM and a form of music therapy that plays an effective adjunctive role in clinical treatment. Music therapy can effectively relieve tension, anxiety, and other negative emotions, thereby improving sleep quality and alleviating pain symptoms to enhance quality of life. This article summarizes the clinical application of TCM five elements music therapy to provide a reference for further research.

Based on TCM theory, five elements music therapy establishes close connections among the five tones, five viscera, and five emotions, and is widely applied in mental, psychological, and psychosomatic disorders. The *Huangdi Neijing* first proposed the theoretical framework of five elements music therapy based on the Five Elements doctrine, providing theoretical guidance for its clinical application. This therapeutic approach uses TCM theory as its foundation, linking the five tones with the five viscera through syndrome differentiation to select appropriate musical pieces for treatment, a method known as “five tones treating disease.” The five tones—Gong, Shang, Jiao, Zhi, and Yu—represent the five notes of the pentatonic scale, arranged according to the sequence of the Five Elements (Earth, Metal, Wood, Fire, Water). The *Suwen • Yinyang Yingxiang Dalun* states: “The liver corresponds to the Jiao tone, the heart to the Zhi tone, the spleen to the Gong tone, the lungs to the Shang tone, and the kidneys to the Yu tone.” Similar discussions appear in the *Suwen • Jinyi Zhenyanlun*, further establishing the correspondence between the five tones and five viscera in accordance with Five Elements theory.

As a non-pharmacological TCM therapy, five elements music therapy offers the advantages of safety and freedom from toxic side effects, demonstrating significant practical value for psychiatric and psychological nursing care. It produces notable effects in relieving mental tension and can markedly improve patients’ depressive and anxious states.

2. Five Elements Music Therapy for Anxiety Symptoms

Five elements music therapy demonstrates significant efficacy in relieving mental tension and improving patients’ depressive and anxious states. As a psychological

nursing method, it has shown certain effects in alleviating anxiety symptoms among patients with chronic diseases.

Zhang Xiaorui et al. conducted a study on postoperative anxiety in pancreatic cancer patients, randomly dividing 60 patients into experimental and control groups using a random number table method. Both groups received standard postoperative care, while the experimental group additionally received Midnight-Noon Ebb-Flow five elements music therapy administered at noon (Wu hour) and evening (You hour) for 30 minutes per session over 7 days, constituting one treatment course. Follow-up was conducted on day 30 post-intervention. Results indicated that the experimental group showed superior outcomes compared to the control group, with significant relief of anxiety symptoms, improved sleep and depressive mood, and reduced caregiver burden, with better efficacy observed over longer intervention periods. This approach leverages time-specific music administration to alleviate negative emotions in postoperative pancreatic cancer patients, promoting TCM nursing and chronomedicine development, and warranting further clinical promotion and mechanistic research.

Li Hongyan et al. employed a randomized controlled trial in which the control group received psychological nursing alone, while the experimental group received combined music therapy. Using the Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS) for comparison, results demonstrated that the experimental group's anxiety improvement was superior to that of the control group.

Zhou Jiajia et al. studied 120 patients diagnosed with chronic heart failure and qi deficiency with blood stasis pattern who also presented with anxiety and depressive symptoms. Using a randomized block design, patients were allocated to control, five elements music, massage, and combined groups of 30 cases each. The five elements music group received conventional treatment plus listening to five elements music during hospitalization; the massage group received conventional treatment plus self-administered or caregiver-administered acupoint massage; and the combined group received conventional treatment plus both massage and music therapy. All three groups continued massage and/or music listening for 3 months post-discharge. SAS and SDS scores were measured before and after the intervention. The study concluded that both acupoint massage and five elements music therapy benefit patients with qi deficiency and blood stasis-type chronic heart failure complicated by anxiety and depression, alleviating somatic symptoms and anxiety.

Gao Lan et al. used the SAS to evaluate and analyze preoperative anxiety in patients undergoing unilateral total knee arthroplasty. Sixty patients with standard scores >50 points who met diagnostic criteria were randomly selected as clinical samples and divided into control and treatment groups of 30 cases each. The control group received auricular point acupressure alone, while the treatment group received combined auricular point acupressure and five elements music therapy. Post-intervention SAS measurements demonstrated that the combined therapy produced significant effects in treating preoperative anxiety.

3. Five Elements Music Therapy for Pain Symptoms

Psychological theory posits that five elements music therapy can reduce pain perception, relieve tension and anxiety, and act on psychological responses to alleviate pain. As a form of music therapy based on TCM theory, it extends the Five Elements doctrine. Traditional Chinese medicine uses Yin-Yang and Five Elements theory as its foundation, following a materialistic natural perspective of correspondence between heaven and humanity and unity of body and mind, thereby organically linking the five tones with the five viscera to provide theoretical support for five elements music therapy.

Yang Lin evaluated the intervention effects of five elements music therapy on chronic pain patients. The control group received conventional nursing and health education, while the experimental group received adjunctive TCM five elements music therapy. After 2 weeks of continuous nursing intervention and 3 months of follow-up, comparative analysis of pre- and post-intervention pain, depression, anxiety, and quality of life showed that five elements music therapy not only alleviated anxiety and depression but also relieved pain and improved quality of life.

Qin Xiaohua et al. studied 60 patients receiving dressing changes for lower extremity traumatic ulcers in the dressing room, dividing them into control and experimental groups. The experimental group received TCM five elements music therapy during dressing changes, while the control group listened to ordinary natural sounds. Visual Analogue Scale scores for pain before, during, and after dressing changes were analyzed and compared. Results indicated that listening to five elements music during dressing changes reduced pain intensity and improved the patient experience.

4. Five Elements Music Therapy for Insomnia

Musical rhythms resonate with brain wave amplitudes and improve sleep quality by reducing the release of neuroendocrine factors. Ma Zhixuan et al. investigated the clinical efficacy of TCM five elements music therapy on tinnitus, insomnia, anxiety, and depression. Sixty tinnitus patients with anxiety and sleep disorders were randomly divided into experimental and control groups of 30 cases each, comparing differences in tinnitus severity, HAMD scores, and PSQI scores before and after treatment. Results demonstrated that five elements music therapy achieved excellent effects in improving sleep disorders and anxiety-depression caused by tinnitus, warranting clinical promotion.

5. Conclusion

In summary, TCM five elements music therapy, as a psychological intervention method, demonstrates significant effects in improving negative emotions such as anxiety and pain symptoms, thereby enhancing clinical efficacy. As an emotional nursing modality, this non-pharmacological green therapy is particularly effective in relieving mental tension, markedly improving patients' depressive and anxious states, and enhancing the patient experience. Its safety and lack of toxic side effects confer important practical value for psychiatric and psychological nursing care.

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