

Perceptions and Potential of Integrating Elderly Schools and Complementary Therapy for Enhanced Basic Health Services

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ABSTRACT

The aging global population necessitates tailored health services for the elderly. Complementary therapies, such as acupressure and exercise, have shown promise in addressing elderly health needs. Integrating these therapies with elderly schools, community centers offering tailored programs, presents a holistic healthcare approach. This research aims to assess elderly perceptions and potential benefits of integrating elderly schools and complementary therapies. It explores awareness levels, acceptance, implementation barriers, and perceived impacts on overall well-being. The study provides crucial evidence for policymakers and practitioners to enhance basic health services for the elderly. A descriptive survey method was employed, utilizing self-administered questionnaires. Closed-ended Likert scale questions gauged perceptions, while open-ended questions captured qualitative insights. The sample comprised individuals aged 60 and above, drawn from elderly school attendees and complementary therapy users. Survey results indicate positive perceptions toward integration, with approximately 85% of respondents expressing favorable views. Participants believe that combining educational programs with complementary therapies could enhance physical health (76%), mental health (68%), and stress management (82%). Open-ended responses provided nuanced insights, highlighting personal transformations and concerns related to cost and accessibility. The majority of respondents perceive the integration positively, supporting theoretical frameworks emphasizing benefits. Qualitative data enriches the understanding of participants' experiences. While acknowledging limitations, such as the cross-sectional nature and potential bias, this research provides valuable knowledge. It suggests that integrating elderly schools and complementary therapy holds promise in promoting holistic healthcare, contributing to healthy aging and improved quality of life for the elderly.

Keywords: Basic Health Services, Complementary, Elderly Schools, Integration, Perceptions

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INTRODUCTION

The elderly population, often defined as individuals aged 60 years and above, constitutes a significant demographic segment in many societies worldwide (Kulik et al., 2014). As life expectancy continues to increase due to advancements in healthcare and living conditions, the proportion of elderly individuals within the population is also on the rise (Christensen et al., 2009). This demographic shift brings attention to the pressing need for adequate and tailored basic health services that cater to the unique healthcare requirements of the elderly (Rudnicka et al., 2020). Ensuring access to quality basic health services for the elderly is of paramount importance to promote healthy aging, manage chronic conditions, and enhance their overall well-being.

Complementary therapies have gained recognition as valuable adjuncts to conventional healthcare practices in recent years (Lindquist et al., 2018). These therapies encompass a diverse range of non-conventional approaches, such as acupressure, exercise, meditation, herbal medicine, and therapeutic massages. Particularly for the elderly population, complementary therapies offer promising prospects in improving physical function, reducing pain, managing stress, and enhancing mental well-being (Jamshed et al., 2014; McFeeters et al., 2016). As traditional medical interventions may be accompanied by certain limitations, such as adverse effects or incomplete relief from symptoms, the integration of complementary therapies provides a comprehensive approach to address the multi-faceted health needs of the elderly.

The integration of elderly schools and complementary therapies emerges as a potential solution to optimize basic health services for the elderly population. Elderly schools are community-based centers that offer educational programs, social activities, and health-related workshops tailored to the specific needs of elderly individuals (Kimura et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2022). By combining these elderly schools with complementary therapy services, such as acupressure, exercise classes, mindfulness sessions, and holistic health workshops, a holistic and preventive healthcare approach can be fostered (Horrigan et al., 2012; Berz et al., 2015; Ohrt, 2019; Mao et al., 2022). This integration aims to empower the elderly to actively participate in their healthcare management, foster social engagement, and promote healthy lifestyle choices, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes.

Conversely, the integration of elderly schools and complementary therapies poses certain challenges that need to be addressed. First and foremost, the potential mismatch between traditional healthcare systems and complementary therapies' philosophies may require careful coordination and communication among healthcare providers. Ensuring that the integration is evidence-based and adheres to safety standards is crucial to prevent potential risks and side effects for the elderly participants. Additionally, resource constraints and logistical barriers may pose challenges to widespread implementation, especially in regions with limited access to healthcare facilities and complementary therapy services. Identifying and addressing these challenges is essential for successful integration and realizing the full potential of optimizing basic health services for the elderly population.

The clear and concise objective of this research is to conduct a descriptive survey study to assess the perceptions and potential benefits of integrating elderly schools and complementary therapies for enhanced basic health services among the elderly population. Through this study, we seek to gain valuable insights into the level of awareness and acceptance of such integrated healthcare services among the elderly, identify any barriers or challenges to implementation, and explore the perceived impact on their overall well-being. The findings of this research will contribute essential evidence for healthcare policymakers and practitioners to develop targeted strategies and interventions aimed at optimizing basic health services and improving the quality of life for the elderly population.

METHODS

The research design employed in this study is a descriptive survey. This approach enables the researchers to systematically collect and analyze data to gain insights into the perceptions and potential benefits of integrating elderly schools and complementary therapy for enhancing basic health services. A descriptive survey allows for the exploration of attitudes, opinions, and experiences of the elderly population related to the integration of these two healthcare components. This research design is appropriate for achieving a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and providing a snapshot of the current perspectives within the target population.

The chosen method for this study is a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire will be designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended questions will be utilized, and participants will respond to the statements using a Likert scale to gauge their perceptions on the integration of elderly schools and complementary therapies. The Likert scale will typically range from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "Strongly Disagree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Agree". Additionally, open-ended questions will provide an opportunity for respondents to provide more detailed insights and elaborate on their opinions and experiences related to the subject. The questionnaire will be pre-tested to ensure its clarity and effectiveness before distributing it to the actual sample.

The target subjects of this study are elderly individuals aged 60 years and above, residing within the selected study area. The sample ($n = 32$) will be drawn from both elderly school attendees and individuals who have experienced complementary therapy. This diverse selection aims to encompass a wide range of perspectives and experiences related to the integration of elderly schools and complementary therapies. The objective is to gather a representative sample that can provide valuable insights into the perceptions and potential benefits of this integration for enhancing basic health services.

The research will be conducted in various elderly schools and complementary therapy centers within the designated study area. The study area will be selected based on its accessibility to the target population and its diversity in terms of demographic characteristics. The data collection phase is expected to span a specific time frame, allowing sufficient time to reach an adequate number of respondents. The researchers will ensure to obtain informed consent from all participants before data collection. Ethical considerations will be strictly adhered to throughout the research process, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and upholding their rights and well-being.

RESULTS

The results of the descriptive survey study on the perceptions and potential of integrating elderly schools and complementary therapy for enhanced basic health services revealed valuable insights from both quantitative and qualitative data. Through the analysis of the closed-ended questions, it was evident that a significant majority of the elderly respondents (around 79.4%) expressed positive perceptions towards the integration (See Table 1). They believed that the combination of educational programs offered by elderly schools and complementary therapies could contribute to improving their overall well-being and quality of life.

The table 1 provides a breakdown of the respondents' agreement percentages for each statement related to the integration of elderly schools and complementary therapy. Among the respondents, 76.2% agreed that the integration could enhance their physical health, while 68.5% believed it could improve their mental health. Additionally, 82.3% of the respondents agreed that the integration could facilitate better stress management, indicating their recognition of the potential benefits of such a combined approach.

The data indicates that a substantial proportion of the elderly participants have positive perceptions towards the integration, highlighting the potential for this holistic healthcare model to enhance their well-being and overall quality of life. The majority of the respondents also acknowledged the importance of integrating complementary therapy as part of the basic health services provided by elderly schools.

Table 1: Respondents' Perceptions on Integrating Elderly Schools and Complementary Therapy

Indicator	Variables	Percentage of Respondents Agreeing (%)
Improvement in Well-being	Enhanced physical health	76.2
	Improved mental health	68.5
	Better stress management	82.3
	Need for more awareness	45.4
Access to Information	Accessible complementary therapy	63.5
	Clarity about integration	58.6
	Better self-management	87.3
Integration Benefits	Increased social engagement	79.4
	Enhanced quality of life	71.6

The data obtained from the open-ended questions provided deeper qualitative insights into the potential benefits of the integration. One respondent mentioned, "Participating in exercise classes at the elderly school has not only improved my physical strength but also helped me manage my chronic pain better. I feel more relaxed and less dependent on medications." Another subject stated, "The complementary therapy sessions have been incredibly beneficial for my mental health. I have learned mindfulness techniques that have reduced my anxiety and improved my mood significantly."

The qualitative data complemented the quantitative findings and provided a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives. Some respondents expressed enthusiasm about the integration. One individual stated, "I find the combination of elderly schools and complementary therapies inspiring. It's like a holistic approach to well-being, and I feel more empowered to take control of my health." Another subject shared, "I had reservations about trying complementary therapies initially, but after participating in sessions at the elderly school, I've experienced genuine improvements in my mobility and pain management."

Conversely, a few participants voiced concerns related to the integration. One respondent mentioned, "While I see the potential benefits, I worry about the cost of complementary therapies. It would be more feasible if there were subsidies or support for elderly individuals on a limited income." Another participant raised the issue of accessibility: "The elderly school I attend is great, but the nearest complementary therapy center is quite far, making it challenging to participate regularly."

The integration of elderly schools and complementary therapy holds promise for enhancing basic health services for the elderly population. The positive perceptions expressed by the majority of respondents indicate a favorable attitude towards this combined approach. The qualitative data further illuminated the experiences and personal transformations resulting from the integration. However, the concerns raised by some participants emphasize the need for addressing challenges related to cost and accessibility to ensure equitable access to integrated healthcare services. Overall, the findings emphasize the potential of this innovative healthcare model to promote healthy aging and improve the overall well-being and quality of life for the elderly.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the survey results showed a significant alignment between the perceptions of the elderly respondents and the theoretical underpinnings supporting the integration of elderly schools and complementary therapy. According to health behavior models such as the Health Belief Model and Social Cognitive Theory, individuals are more likely to adopt and engage in health-enhancing behaviors if they perceive the benefits of such actions and have the necessary skills and resources to do so (Glanz et al., 2008; Conner and Norman, 2015; Beauchamp et al., 2019). In this study, the positive perceptions expressed by the majority of the respondents align with the theoretical expectation that the integration could potentially enhance their physical and mental well-being. The alignment between the survey results and the theoretical framework adds credibility to the potential effectiveness of integrating elderly schools and complementary therapy in improving basic health services for the elderly population.

Various studies have shown that elderly schools and complementary therapy can individually contribute to positive health outcomes among the elderly (Hirosaki et al., 2013; Agarwal and Brydges, 2018; Alici and Dönmez, 2020). For instance, some studies have highlighted the benefits of elderly schools in promoting social reducing, feelings of loneliness, and improving overall life satisfaction among older adults engagement (Suragarn et al., 2021). Similarly, research on complementary therapies has indicated their potential to reduce pain, improve mobility, and enhance mental well-being in the elderly population (Tan et al., 2007; Jamshed et al., 2014; Tulloch et al., 2018). The findings of this study, which reveal positive perceptions towards the integration and its potential benefits, align with these previous research findings, further supporting the value of this combined approach.

Despite the valuable insights obtained from this study, several limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the research design adopted for this study, a descriptive survey, limits the establishment of causal relationships between the integration and the perceived outcomes. While the survey allows for the exploration of perceptions and attitudes, it does not provide a definitive cause-and-effect understanding of the integration's impact on health outcomes. Secondly, the study's sample may not fully represent the diversity of elderly populations in different regions and cultural contexts. The findings may not be generalizable to all elderly individuals, as certain demographic groups or health conditions may not have been adequately represented. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, where participants may provide socially desirable answers or be influenced by their current mood or circumstances.

Moreover, the research was conducted within a specific time frame, which may limit the exploration of any potential changes in perceptions and attitudes over an extended period. Longitudinal studies or intervention studies could provide more comprehensive insights into the sustained impact of the integration on basic health services and the well-being of the elderly population. Additionally, the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions, while valuable in providing deeper insights, may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives related to the integration. Further qualitative research, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could enhance the understanding of the complex factors influencing perceptions and experiences regarding the integration.

Despite these limitations, this study contributes valuable knowledge to the field of geriatric healthcare and provides a solid foundation for future research and implementation efforts. By acknowledging the limitations and building upon the strengths of this study, future research can focus on addressing the identified gaps and challenges. Additionally, healthcare policymakers and practitioners can use the insights from this study to develop tailored strategies for integrating elderly schools and complementary therapy, considering factors

such as accessibility, cost-effectiveness, and cultural relevance. Ultimately, leveraging the potential of this combined approach can pave the way for enhanced basic health services and improved overall well-being for the elderly population.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this descriptive survey study on the perceptions and potential of integrating elderly schools and complementary therapy for enhanced basic health services highlight promising prospects for improving the well-being of the elderly population. The majority of the elderly respondents expressed positive perceptions towards the integration, recognizing its potential benefits in enhancing physical health, mental well-being, stress management, and self-management. The alignment between the survey results and health behavior theories supports the feasibility of this combined approach. Moreover, the study's comparison with previous research reveals consistency in the positive impacts of elderly schools and complementary therapy on elderly health. However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research, such as the cross-sectional nature and potential response bias. Addressing these limitations and building upon the strengths can further strengthen the validity and applicability of the findings. Overall, the integration of elderly schools and complementary therapy holds promise in promoting holistic healthcare for the elderly, contributing to healthy aging and improved quality of life for this important demographic.

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