

Abstract Details

Title: **Improved Connection, Emotional Expression, and Engagement in Nursing Home Residents with Dementia through Musical Improvisation.**

Authors: **Sandra Oppikofer, Switzerland**; Andreas Lukas Huber, *Switzerland*

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Background: “Music Circles” is an eight-week programme implementing an interactive and creative music-making together with people with dementia, caregivers, professional musicians, and other care home staff carried out for the first time in Switzerland.

Research question: How does active music-making in a group using improvisation affect residents with dementia in different care institutions in terms of social interactions, emotional well-being and participation?

Method: Multimodal data collection: sociodemographic data, MMSE, qualitative content analysis of diaries of musicians and care home staff members as well as behavioural observations of people with dementia during the music sessions (video recordings, quantitative evaluations).

The Music in Dementia Assessment Scale was used to observe and analyse the interest, perception of the environment, initiative, involvement, and enjoyment of a total of 24 residents in three sessions each (N=72).

Sample: Sample of participants from three “Music Circles” cycles in three different care homes in Switzerland: n=24, average age=86.6 years (range: 75-98), 79.2% women, 20.8% men. MMSE: 9.3 (range: 0-20).

Results: The “Music Circles” intervention had positive effects on residents in all participating care institutions. Music facilitated social interaction despite limited verbal communication and temporarily improved well-being. Residents became more aware of others, increasing eye contact, spontaneous physical interactions, and participation in shared activities. Sessions evoked joy and relaxation, with effects sometimes lasting beyond the sessions, reducing fear and irritability. Residents showed heightened attentiveness and actively engaged by clapping, moving to music, playing instruments, or improvising melodies. Relationships with musicians and staff were strengthened. Overall, music enhanced connection, emotional expression, and engagement among people with dementia.

Discussion: These findings expand on prior research, highlighting how musical improvisation enables measurement of emotional well-being in people with dementia. Increased social interactions and significantly higher activity levels underscore the effectiveness of this innovative intervention for improving quality of life in this population.