Exploring assisted-living older adults’ experience and perceived psychosocial benefits of compassionate presence (CP) sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic
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Background

- Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 24% of community-dwelling older Americans aged 65+ felt socially isolated and around 35% reported feeling lonely.
- Loneliness and isolation are even more common among older adults living in long-term care settings.
- The feeling of loneliness and isolation increase the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, depressed immune system, reduced cognitive function, sleep disturbance, depression, etc. 1, 6.
- Research shows that many older adults in long-term care settings experience greater emotional and existential loneliness. 1, 6.
- The compassionate presence (CP) intervention may be a promising non-pharmacologic approach that could reduce emotional and existential loneliness and feeling of isolation among older adults.
- This pilot study explored the effectiveness of intergenerational compassionate presence sessions in reducing loneliness and isolation among assisted-living older adults during this pandemic.

Methods

Design and Setting

- This study is an exploratory qualitative study.
- Twenty-two older adults residing in two assisted living facilities located in the Twin Cities, participated in 10-week virtual CP sessions facilitated by college students.

Training of Student Facilitators (SFs)

- Compassion can be influenced by training. 17 and when individuals are trained to explicitly listen to, and feel empathy with another, compassion levels increase.
- We trained SFs on deep and active listening skills based on a toolkit we developed. See Table 1.

Table 1: Details of the CP training session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>1st CP session</td>
<td>All participants attended the first CP session. The SF introduced and explained the goals of the CP intervention. The SF facilitated interactive discussions on subjects related to the theme of the session. The SFs engaged in relationship-building activities to create a safe and supportive environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>2nd CP session</td>
<td>Participants responded to semi-structured questions on their experience and feelings about their CP sessions and what they enjoyed sharing with student facilitators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 3</td>
<td>3rd CP session</td>
<td>Participants responded to semi-structured questions on their experience and perception of the CP sessions facilitated by college students participating.</td>
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</table>

Data Collection and Analysis

- Two themes emerged from the data. The first theme represents participants’ thoughts and feelings about their CP sessions and what they enjoyed sharing with student facilitators. See Table 3.

Table 3: CP Sessions: Experience, Stumbling, and Sample Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thought</td>
<td>Session</td>
<td>Feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>experience</td>
<td>She made me feel very much at ease. I just poured out things I’ve never in my life talked about before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel bored</td>
<td>“I looked forward to the first session and I went home and thought about things and stuff, and the more I got to see the more I enjoyed looking forward to it.”</td>
<td>I had a lot of stories to tell about each other, about family, about my family was at how many grandchildren I had, and how many great-grandchildren I had. I had a good talk every week, and I really enjoyed all these weeks of talking to them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life experience</td>
<td>“I feel a deep connection. I know what she was doing. She knew my sort of position, and I tried to explain to her what it is like being in a nursing home.”</td>
<td>“I feel a lot of things I’ve communicated to her, and I was very much satisfied with the conversations we had.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

- The second theme describes how participants benefited from participating in the CP sessions with college students. See Table 4.

Table 4: CP Progression Emotional Benefits, Categories, and Sample Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjunctive</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Emotional benefits</th>
<th>Sample responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>benefits</td>
<td>Decreased feeling of loneliness</td>
<td>“It got you away from everything else. I got lonely at times. I remembered someone could talk to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>benefits</td>
<td>Increased appreciation and joy</td>
<td>“I feel better. I’ve been on one or two occasions, and that made me happy. I got to get a chance at the chance to do that in the presence of’ the pandemic.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limitations

- Older adults described their experience using words like comfortable, nice, fun, interesting, good, enjoying, satisfying, etc.
- Participants felt happy, relaxed, important, valued, and respected, which may have enhanced their sense of self-worth.
- Participants reported a decreased loneliness, isolation, and improved mood.
- The deep connections between the SFs and older adults seemed to enhance the older adults’ sense of meaning in life, easing their loneliness and isolation during this pandemic.

References


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