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"ON STAGE IN THE GOLDEN AGE: THEATRE FOR HEALTHY AGEING"

Module 3

Theatre and theatre activities as prevention and health promotion in old age's mental health disorders



lecompagniemalviste



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activities for
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Module Overview

Objectives and learning outcomes:

- *To understand the use of theatre as an alternative method of prevention and health promotion in old age's mental health disorders.*
- To provide to learners the **skills for implementing theatre activities with older people**, in their respective contexts, and to introduce theatre and theatre activities as a prevention and health promotion tool for mental health disorders.
- At the end of the training programme, we expect participants to **understand the use of theatre as an alternative method of prevention and health promotion** of all these issues.



Content

Part I. Theoretical approaches & key concepts

Part II. Use of theatre in the aging field: impact, benefits and ethical principles

Part III Types of theatre and theatre activities for preventing mental health issues in older age



Introduction

- Theatre is an **art form**. It has been shown to **benefit all older adults**, regardless of their background or health status.
- One of the **oldest** and most **significant performance arts**;
- Encourages **active participation** and **interaction**;
- Has the potential to **improve health and well-being**, while also **fostering education** and **social change**.
- Theatre's therapeutic value as a **health-promoting component** dates back to ancient times, with roots in healing ceremonies and theatrical performances found across different cultures.
- **Older adults** are frequently motivated to participate in creative and theatrical activities for a variety of reasons, such as **improving their health, furthering their education, seeking recreation, and using the activities for therapy and healing**.



PART I: Theoretical approaches & key concepts





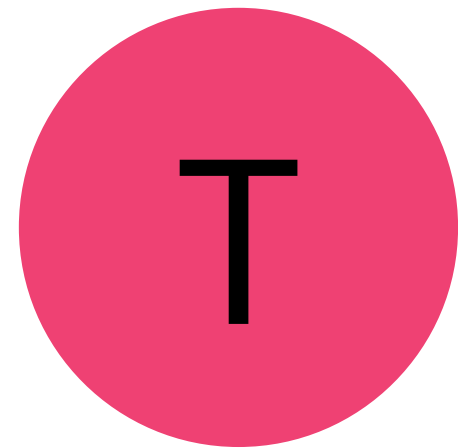
Theatre

The term “theatre” encompasses a variety of meanings, including both a **physical place** and a **form of performing art**.

- ✓ **Physical place** indicates a building (usually with a stage) in which spectacles and performances take place.
- ✓ As a **performing art form**, theatre is defined as a collaborative art form where live performers portray the experience of a real or imagined event before and audience in a specific place.

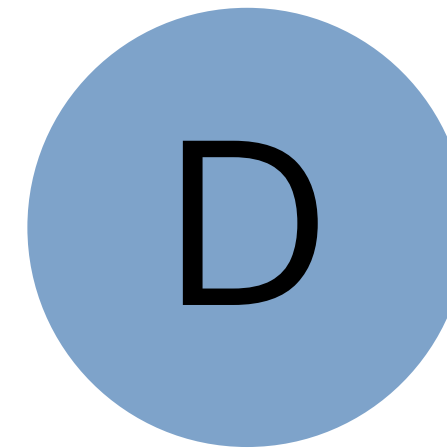


Theatre & Drama



- Theatre is a physical entity
- Theater is the onstage production of a play
- There is no direct interaction between audience and the dramatist
- Interpretation of the play depends on the reader

Source: PEDIAA, 2016



- Drama is an abstract entity
- Drama is the script of a play
- There is direct interaction between the reader and dramatist
- Interpretation of the play depends on the artists

Mental Health

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It has intrinsic and instrumental values and is integral to our well-being.”

WHO, 2022



- Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.
- Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health conditions are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being, but this is not always or necessarily the case.

WHO, 2022

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Aging and Mental Health

- The global **older adults' population** is continuously increasing, with people now living longer than previous generations.
- It is estimated that the **number of individuals aged 65 years and over** worldwide is projected to more than double, rising from **761 million in 2021 to 1.6 million in 2050**.
- However, as individuals age, they may become **more vulnerable** to various **health issues**, including pandemics, chronic illnesses, mental health disorders, Alzheimer's disease, or other forms of dementia.
- **Rates of dementia and mild cognitive impairment notably increase with age** across all countries. In response, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023).
- Around 14% of adults aged 60 and over live with a mental disorder (GHDx, 2021).
- Mental disorders among older adults account for 10.6% of the total years lived with disability for this age group (WHO, 2023).
- The most common mental health conditions for older adults are depression and anxiety (WHO, 2023).



Key challenges

Mental Health Challenges Facing Older Adults (1/2)

At older ages, mental health is shaped not only by physical and social environments but also by the **cumulative impacts of earlier life experiences** and **specific stressors related to ageing**. **Exposure to adversity, significant loss in intrinsic capacity** and **a decline in functional ability** can all result in **psychological distress**. Specifically, **key challenges** in mental health for the older adults are:

- **Social isolation and loneliness can exacerbate mental health issues.** They affect about a quarter of older people (Teo et al., 2023) and are an important risk factor for Alzheimer's disease, major depression, and generalized anxiety disorder, as well as for cardiovascular and metabolic diseases (Domènech-Abella et al., 2019; Kuiper et al., 2015; Valtorta et al. 2016).
- **Cognitive decline due to aging can lead to depression or anxiety.** Seniors with depression or dementia have complex medical needs that require precise coordination between primary and mental health care providers. It is necessary to address treatment interactions, medication management, and co-morbidities, which can get tough to manage.



Key challenges

Mental Health Challenges Facing Older Adults (2/2)

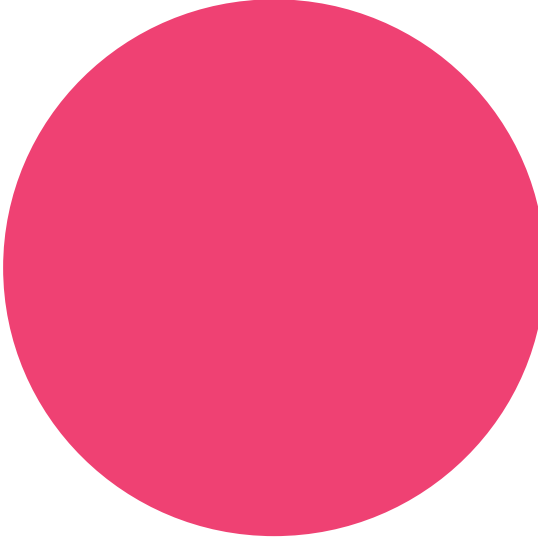
- **Physical health issues may limit participation in conventional therapies.** Some older adults are at greater risk of depression and anxiety, because of poor physical health or lack of access to quality support and services. This includes older adults living with chronic illnesses (such as heart disease, cancer or stroke), or neurological conditions (such as dementia).
- **Ageism and stigma against mental disorders.** Aging and older adults are often discussed by the general public and the media using negative stereotypes, such as a decline in mental and cognitive function. Unfortunately, this type of pejorative view of later life may be internalized by older individuals themselves and enacted, creating a vicious circle resulting in poor mental health. Ageism causes inequalities and has detrimental effects on the individual, community and society (Nguyen & Jeste, 2021). Stigma can lead to delayed diagnosis and treatment because older individuals may not want to seek help due to their lack of knowledge about mental ailments. They might also fear judgment from others, causing them to bury the issue and suffer in silence.



PART II: Use of theatre in the aging field: impact, benefits, & ethical principles





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- Creativity is widely recognized as a pathway to active and healthy ageing (Cristini & Cesa-Bianchi, 2019; O’Neill, 2019). Research indicates that incorporating theatrical activities into creative interventions can significantly improve the physical and mental health, as well as the psychosocial well-being of older adults.
 - The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023) and the European Commission have strongly advocated for active and healthy ageing, proposing **arts-based interventions** that link the benefits of creativity to both physical and mental health.
 - Particularly, WHO (2019) has provided strong evidence that the arts help promote good health, prevent various mental and physical health issues and treat or manage acute and chronic conditions that emerge during people’s lives.



Overview: Benefits of Theatre for Older Adults

- Existing research shows that older adults, including those with dementia-Alzheimer, can benefit from taking part in theatrical programs and activities that bring joy, break isolation, increase physical fitness, reconfigure relationships, stimulate the imagination, and improve cognitive abilities.
- Studies on older people with dementia and Alzheimer's disease have shown that they can fully participate in theatrical practices that are appropriate for their abilities and that using specific theatrical techniques to improve their health and overall well-being will benefit them the most.
- Despite the limited research on theatre and drama-based interventions for older people in dementia care around the world (Keisari et al., 2020), there is evidence that the existing programs can improve positive emotions, learning, social skills, communication, and self-esteem while also reducing depressive symptoms (see, for example, Zeisel et al., 2018; Stevens, 2012).



Benefits of Theatre for Older Adults

The benefits for the elderly, in particular, can be divided into 4 major domains:

Health and Cognition

- improvements in cognitive functioning, memory, word generation and comprehension, and problem-solving
- stress reduction
- decrease anxiety and depression

Emotional and Social Benefits

- development of new relationships and friendships
- fostering of intergenerational trust and empathy
- increased self-confidence and self-affirmation
- building positive relationships with peers, caregivers, families, and health and social care professionals
- feelings of excitement, fun, happiness, and freeing of the imagination
- strengthen communication skills and interpersonal relationships



Benefits of Theatre for Older Adults

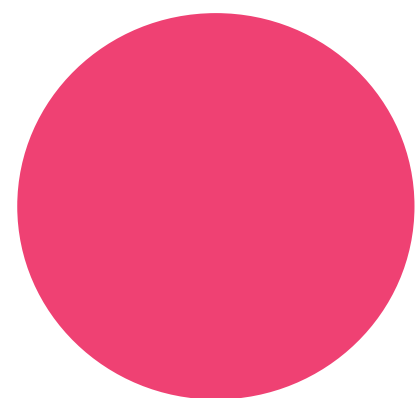
The benefits for the elderly, in particular, can be divided into 4 major domains:

Creativity and Learning

- development of new skills, being challenged, and taking risks in later life
- self-expression, play, and fun
- breaking down ageist stereotypes and encouraging an all-inclusive society
- cultivate the creative self
- gain theatre/drama and acting skills

Physical Fitness

- improve mobility, flexibility, strength, balance, and cardiovascular health
- body awareness
- enhance overall physical well-being



Prevention of mental disorders among older adults using arts



- **Arts Participation & Mental Health:**
 - Frequent arts and cultural engagement improves mental health, reducing distress and enhancing life satisfaction (Wang et al., 2020).
 - Arts activities support coping with mental health issues in everyday life.
- **Emotion Regulation through Arts:**
 - Avoidance: Arts offer a safe space, redirecting attention from negative thoughts.
 - Approach: Helps process emotions, vent negativity, and plan problem-solving.
 - Self-Development: Enhances self-identity, self-esteem, and agency (Fancourt et al., 2019)
- **Group Participation & Well-Being:**
 - Choirs, dance, and theatre groups improve life satisfaction, purpose, and reduce loneliness (Bone et al., 2022)
 - Linked to better health outcomes: less chronic illness, improved immune function, and mental health (Steptoe & Fancourt, 2020)
- **Cognitive Decline & Arts:**
 - Active arts engagement slows cognitive decline and enhances quality of life (Fancourt & Steptoe, 2018)



PART III: Types of theatre and theatre activities for preventing mental health issues in older age





Types of theatre and theatre activities for preventing mental health issues in older age

- Existence of a wide range of theatrical intervention programs aimed at the elderly.
 - o i.e. specific types of theatre, such as Playback Theatre, Reminiscence Theatre, or Readers' Theatre to assist older people in improving their health and maintaining their well-being and independence as they age.
 - o Other programs include a variety of sensory, dramatic, and aesthetic activities, as well as music-based experiential exercises inspired by and based on theatre and drama to elicit memories or encourage older persons to use their imagination and creativity.



Types of theatre and theatre activities for preventing mental health issues in older age

- Theatrical interventions for older adults can incorporate creative therapeutic approaches, such as drama therapy, and employ various techniques such as theatre games, storytelling, story writing, photography, puppets, and poetry to stimulate memory and facilitate reflection on one's life.
- Memory activities and games are common choices in creative programs for older adults, particularly those with dementia, as they can help boost brain health and slow down cognitive decline.



Types of theatre and theatre activities for preventing mental health issues in older age

- Theatre and drama activities, whether used for entertainment, healing, or teaching, must always be enjoyable, user-friendly, and well-designed to suit older people's physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs.
- Not all older people have the same psychosocial needs due to individual and cultural differences. There is no "**one size fits all**" theatrical intervention, but rather a variety of approaches that can be tailored to each person's needs and settings in order to be effective.
- This tailored approach not only ensures that older people receive adequate creative care, but it also improves their overall well-being and quality of life.



Creative (improvisational) drama is an arts-based activity that has been shown to have significant personal and social value for older adults as a side effect or immediate result of participating in a series of such activities. It refers to dramatic activities that are designed to help participants develop their cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and moral thinking skills, including those with dementia-Alzheimer.

Creative Drama

Reminiscence Theatre

Reminiscence Theatre is a form of interactive drama in which older adults share memories and experiences through dialogue, storytelling, and creative activities. It takes verbatim memories as the basis for theatre scripts, using the experiences of older people as a source of artistic production and therapeutic creativity (e.g., Kosti, 2019; Schweitzer, 2007).



Playback Theatre is a type of improvisational theatre in which audience members volunteer stories from their lives and watch them performed on stage. Keisari and colleagues (2020) used playback theatre in a structured 12-week group intervention and found significant improvements in self-esteem, positive affect, meaning in life, and quality of life, as well as a significant decrease in depressive disorders.

Playback Theatre

Improvisation Theatre (or Theatre Improvisation)

It is a stimulating and imaginative way for seniors to keep up their cognitive abilities, interpersonal skills, and active participation. Improvisatory theatre techniques may also prove advantageous for caregivers as a means of coping with the challenges they encounter (e.g., Bassis, Rybko, & Maor, 2023).

It is a theatre-based communication method that uses theatrical stimuli (e.g., songs, poetry) in conjunction with person-centred approaches to encourage vulnerable people to make contact. This is not only for the person who is having difficulty making contact but also for those around them, such as family members and caregivers. The 'Veder Method' was developed for people with dementia and their caregivers, but it can be applied to a wide range of cognitive impairments and psychiatric disorders (e.g., van Haften-van Dijk, van Weert, & Dröes, 2015).



The Veder Method

Veder Contact Method

This is a modified version of the original Veder Method, tailored specifically for daily care settings. It emphasises integrating theatrical, poetic, and musical communication into routine caregiving tasks rather than relying on structured performances. The aim is to enhance everyday interactions between caregivers and residents by using elements of the Veder Method during personal care activities. It involves training caregivers to incorporate elements of theatrical communication into their caregiving practices without needing extensive performance skills (Boersma et al., 2017).



Readers' Theatre is a form of drama that requires participants to read aloud a scripted narrative to the audience. Participants have their scripts in hand and act without the necessity of memorising lines. Readers Theatre may not utilise any performance, scenery, props, or costumes, and the plays performed are one-act or brief adaptations of longer productions. No acting experience is necessary (eg., Khanlou et al., 2022).

Readers' Theatre

Recreational Drama

It makes use of a variety of dramatic activities to provide older people with recreational opportunities (eg., Sextou & Smith, 2017).



It is an active life review method that uses carefully selected autobiographical memories, self-defining life experiences, or life periods that shaped a participant. Participants can easily explore identity, meaning, and relationships with their surroundings by sharing and bringing life-crossroads stories to life (e.g., Keisari & Palgi, 2017).

Life-crossroads

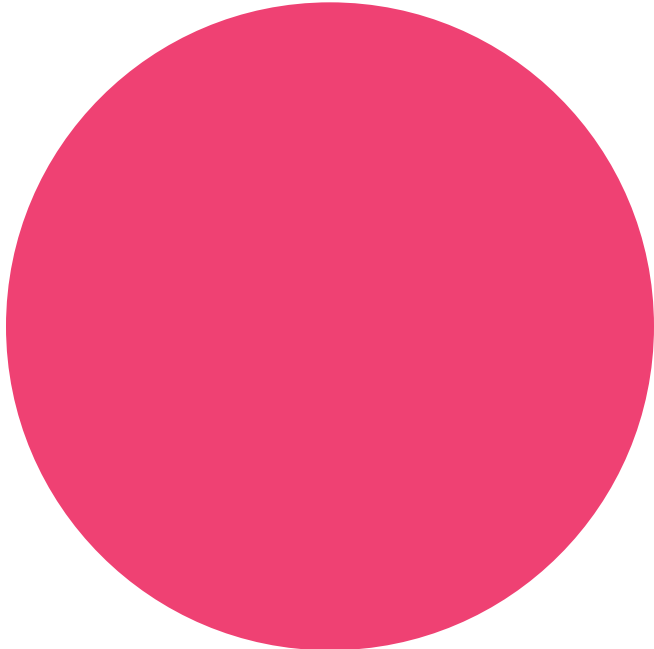
TimeSlips

It is a creative, group storytelling method for people with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders. The method makes use of storytelling to engage people with dementia in meaningful ways. It acknowledges the importance of creative storytelling for people with dementia, shifting the emphasis from memory to imagination (Basting, 2013).



Ethical Principles for Theatre and Drama-based Work with Older People

Theatrical programs and interventions involving older adults must prioritize **inclusivity, diversity,** and the **ethical integrity** of professionals, as with any creative endeavor that engages and stimulates human potential.



Inclusivity must be a top priority, which means that the program should be designed to cater to individuals of all backgrounds and abilities. This approach ensures that older adults from diverse backgrounds can participate and benefit from the program, regardless of their social, cultural, or physical differences.

Diversity refers to the range of experiences, perspectives, and ideas that are brought to the program. By incorporating diversity into the program, it is possible to create more dynamic and engaging experiences that appeal to a broader range of participants.

Professionals' **ethical integrity** must also be considered. This simply means that the professionals involved in the program must be trustworthy, knowledgeable, and experienced. They must operate with honesty, transparency, and respect for the participants, ensuring that the program is safe, effective, and beneficial for all involved.

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Thank you!

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