
TAI-CHI EXERCISES FOR SCHIZOPHRENIA

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Background: The benefits of Tai-chi on relaxation, mental focus, motor coordination, balance, and stress reduction may help improve symptoms control and physical functioning in schizophrenic patients. The study aims at evaluating the effects of Tai-chi and developing this mind-body exercise in residential care of schizophrenia in long term.

Method: The RCT included a pilot trial and an on-going 3-arm main study. A pilot trial with 30 participants randomly allocated into a 12-session (6-week) Tai-chi program and control group was conducted. Gross motor coordination, negative symptoms and functional disabilities were assessed at baseline, 1 week and 6 weeks post-intervention. Recruitment of 150 participants for the main study was conducted at the same hostel. They were randomly allocated into Tai-chi group, exercise group and wait-list control group. The study is still in progress and will be reported in the presentation.

Results: For the pilot trial, participants in the control group showed marked deteriorations in the above areas throughout the study period. Tai-chi showed a protective effect from deteriorations in gross motor coordination ($Z=-2.28$; $p=.023$), and interpersonal functioning which could be sustainable for 6 weeks after the program ($Z=-2.56$; $p=.01$). Preliminary results of the main study will be presented in the conference.

Conclusion: The pilot trial demonstrated the positive effects of Tai-chi on promoting movement coordination and alleviating functional disabilities. The group exercise format encourages socialization and interpersonal functioning. Tai-chi emphasizes movement rhythm and inner calmness which may further help symptoms control. The main study will confirm the results of the pilot trial.