



A Longitudinal Exploratory Study on Finger Knitting Focusing Oriented –Therapy and Mindfulness

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Abstract

Mental health issues should be confronted by everyone, especially living in such a rapid developing world. People employ art therapy as an outlet for their negative thoughts. Finger knitting, a new solution integrating technology and art, has numerous benefits, such as providing a sense of satisfaction from creation, simplicity, systematic skill and economical and time efficiency. Hence, this study thus aimed to explore the possibility of using finger knitting to cope with various moods and facilitate personal growth. Four sessions finger knitting workshop and interviews were done and participants were extremely satisfied. It was found that finger knitting helped to improve self-esteem and facilitate mental health. It also promoted active lifestyle and enhanced social involvement. It thus suggested finger knitting have high possibility to be a therapy and worth of further study.

Keywords: Finger Knitting; Art Therapy; Mental Health; Self-Esteem

Introduction

As 'No health without mental health', World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of mental health since mental disorders are very common currently that approximately 13% of the global burden of disease has been attributed to neuropsychiatric disorders [1]. With reference to WHO, there are around 4,500,000 people experience mental problem [2] and approximately 800,000 people commit suicide per year and 90% of them are suffering from mental disorder [1]. The crucial strategy to treat mental health problems is to treat it as early as possible since they are developed mainly by accumulating stress or upset feeling. Nowadays, people try various methods to cope with stress, such as doing exercise and listen to music. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of those methods is uncertain. Some people even found no method to help with their negative emotion. Recently, more and more people try to reduce mental health problems or alleviate tense life by various psychotherapies, such as art therapy, music therapy, horticulture therapy and so on. Take art therapy as an example. It refers to a human service profession that acts as catalysts to facilitate constructive development and promote positive thoughts via art making or other creative processes [3-5]. That means the practice of art therapy includes the use of knowledge of various aspects, such as emotional, social, and behavioral aspects, to foster personal growth and enable self-discovery [6]. Through the creation of arts,

it reflects people's will to response to their problems and mood. The process also serves as a therapeutic process to bring out their feelings and alleviate their negative emotions. Notwithstanding the popularity of art therapy, its effectiveness was still not well known. Previous studies found out that there were limited academic data to provide support to the effectiveness of art therapy. Similar case can be found in other psychotherapies [7]. Hence, this research is going to develop an innovative method that to improve mental health, enhance self-awareness and personal growth. For this study, finger knitting is chosen as the medium. Its nature is similar an art medium that enable free creation and self-expression.

Finger Knitting

Finger knitting does not equal to hand knitting. The system enables human fingers to imitate the working principle of knitting machine. Almost all kinds of complex knitting machinery and fabric can be completed through finger knitting. In short, finger knitting is a complete system and foundation that is simple and exert one's creativity. The authors demonstrated knitting skills to university students with this method and the feedback and output were all positive. Figure 1 demonstrates the similar working principles of finger knitting and machine knitting. Fingers act like the latch needles. The movements of fingers replaced the opening, feeding, drawing and knock-off to form a stitch. The entire steps by finger knitting are shown on Figure 2.

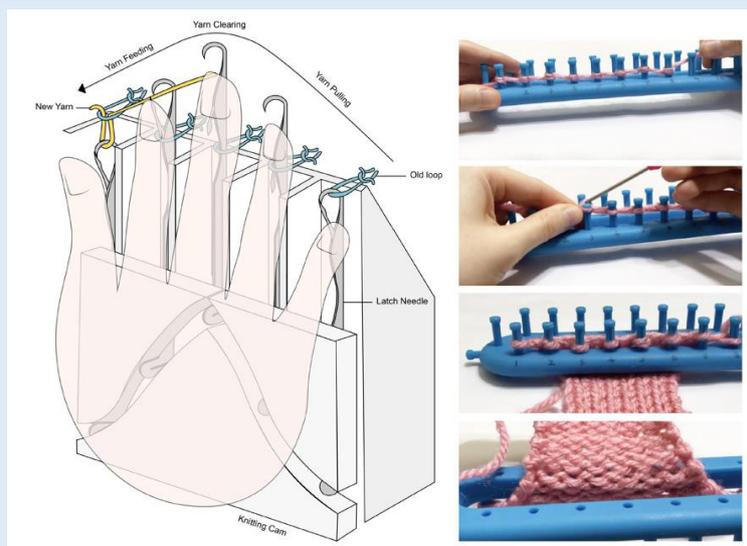


Figure 1: Working principle of finger knitting and machine knitting (Left) and the knitting procedures by traditional knitting tools (Right).

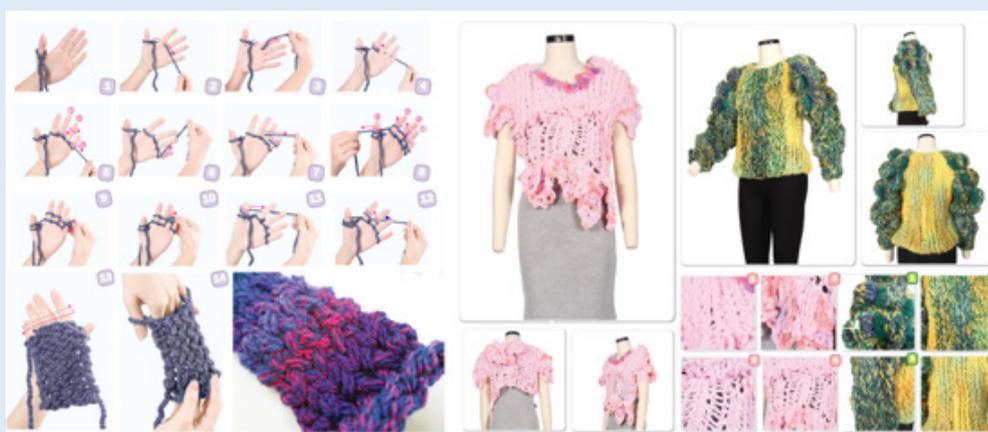


Figure 2: procedures of fabricating a jersey by finger knitting (left) and university students' knit products by finger knitting (right).

Finger Knitting in Promoting Mental Health

It is generally believed that developing an interest or hobby brings countless benefits in different aspects. From literature, taking part in hobby or leisure activity demonstrated positive influence on quality of life, personal growth and mental health [8-12]. In addition, Riley et al. [11] research demonstrated the capability of performing knitting in enhancing social connection and communication. Craft Yarn Council (CYC), for instance, carried out projects that promoted knitting and contributed to a friendly neighborhood [13]. Noticeably, there was also an international conference on therapeutic knitting, called "Knitting to Facilitate Change", which was held on 2012 [14]. This supported and stimulated the development of knitting as a therapy. Finger knitting, indeed, may be an important and effective therapeutic method that helped to facilitate mental health. It is easy to learn and brings numerous advantages. It involves creativity processes, such as materials selection and design, and thus could be a medium

for self-expression and self-understanding. Completion of a knit product (knitter's goal) might give knitter a sense fulfillment and boost his/her self-worth and self-esteem. It also could give knitters a feeling of warmth and physical ease that eventually contributes to stress reduction and calming effect. Particularly, when a knitter is focusing on finger knitting, he/she may neglect his/her negative thought. Research also suggested that knitting help to stabilize heart rate and promote a meditative-like state [15,16]. Moreover, finger knitting, especially for group knitting, facilitates social involvement and enhances social confidence of knitter as it provides opportunity for social connection and communication [15,17]. Sharing and teaching finger knitting could also influence others positively and creates a sense of belongings.

Prior to this study, hand movement was found beneficial to the elderly by chance. As a result, a casual experiment was carried out in order to study the effect of finger knitting on the flexibility of hand movement and psychological impact to the elderly. It aimed to

utilize finger knitting and upper limb exercise to improve elderly's hand function and muscle strength. 12 elderly completed the whole training that there were 6 sessions and each session lasted for 1.5 hours. Apart from the upper limb training, elderly learned finger knitting to make a simple jersey scarf. In that study, depression level of the elderly was also measured. Also, there were chatting with the elderly as unstructured interviews and observation to gather their opinions. Elderly, who participated in that experiment, were reported with improved mood. They felt happy and satisfaction.

They interacted with other elderly well. Sharing and mutual support were found during the program (Figure 3). Therefore, a longitudinal trial was conducted to systematically analyze the impact of finger knitting on mental health and emotion. The major objective of this study was developing finger knitting as a therapy that helped to improve mood, reduce stress and enhance self-esteem. Therefore, the main hypotheses were that finger knitting had positive impact on mood and it had significant influence on self-esteem.



Figure 3: Activity photos during the previous project.

The Study

This pilot research mainly employed interview with participants who were new to finger knitting (an easier type of knitting that help to reduce chance of failure and maximize the benefits). Subjects were recruited by convenience sampling method. Poster regarding

the program was put up and subject respond to it was selected according to the following criteria:

- a) Willing to participate in the study and
- b) Must not undergo other psychotherapy during the program.



Figure 4: Photos showing the finger knitting workshop and participants' products.

A total of 12 participants who were aged from 18 to 25 and living in Hong Kong completed the four sessions finger knitting workshop. This age group was selected since they were usually suffered from high academic pressure while they were more easily affected by sense of achievement. Also, this age range had a significant ratio and an increasing participating rate of knitting population [13,18]. They signed informed consent before participating in the study. After a

short pre-interview, participants were found that they were mainly having general and common mental health problems, such as having high stress from study or work and suffered from negative thoughts and emotions that had no effective way to cope with. Some of them had slightly problem of insomnia or anxiety. Since this is a pilot test to explore participants' insights and experience, complicated case might used later to understand the relationship between mood and

designed intervention. Hence, people with serious neuropsychiatric disorders might not be suitable in this time. For the program, each session lasted for 60 minutes and participants were encouraged to practice twice a week at home. After the four sessions workshop, participants were able to finish a knit product by finger knitting. Figure 4 shows the whole procedures of the study and Figure 4 shows some of the participants' final knit products. The activities and objectives were:

- a) **Session 1:** To get know with each other and familiar with objectives and basic of finger knitting in order to facilitate a friendly learning environment.
- b) **Session 2:** To learn simple finger knitting stitches and promote a mutual support environment.
- c) **Session 3:** To learn the binding off and linking of knitted pieces and to improve dexterity; and
- d) **Session 4:** To encourage creativity by applying various stitches, as well as promote appreciation and recognition.

For each session, four-stage method suggested by Campbell [19], includes warming up, core activity, feedback and ending, was applied. Observations and informal interviews were used to understand participants' insights of the program and perception towards finger knitting. Thematic analysis was adopted for analysis [20]. The themes were calming and relaxation effect.

- a) self-confidence and satisfaction.
- b) social involvement and
- c) active lifestyle and productivity.

The following parts are the summaries and discussion of the findings based on the theme.

Calming and Relaxation Effect

On the whole, participants were exceedingly satisfied and thought positively regarding their experiences on finger knitting and its therapeutic effect. They shared a common view that finger knitting bring improvement on well-being and promote mental health. Before the workshops, participants were considered themselves having "high pressure" and "a feeling of uncertainty", as well as being "not able to concentrate" and "irritable". Those are typical emotional symptoms of stress [21]. Nevertheless, performing finger knitting helped them to disperse their attention of negatives thoughts or problems faced. This finally brought a calming and relaxation effect: "It really has impact on relaxation when performing finger knitting. In addition, when (I am) focusing on doing one thing, the feeling is different." "Have certain impact on reducing stress. When you are facing problems, be relaxed and play knitting, it would have benefits." Some of the participants claimed that they were thinking too much and made themselves confused and depressed when they were alone. Concentrating on finger knitting could allow them to free from unrealistic apprehension: "Finger knitting enables me to focus on one thing and forget the unhappy thing at a short-run." "When (I am) being bored, (I) can

have something to play with, so that I will not think too much." In addition, a lady who was faced examination during participation period. She became nervous and was being fear of failure. She thus could not focus on studying and other daily works. She was also being sensitive and bad-tempered that made her being difficult to get along with. Nonetheless, she incidentally thought of the joyful time of finger knitting workshop, she started to knit and found that it really helped: "(I) can sit down and look at the scene outside while finger knitting, (I) thus can become less irritable and being calm." This advantage of reducing stress and promoting relaxation might attributed to the nature of movement of finger knitting, that are bilateral, rhythmic, repetitive and automatic movements as suggested by Corkhill [15]. These kinds of movements facilitated a meditative-like state as this kind of hand movements can cross over the midline of body and normalizing spatial awareness and stimulate the release of serotonin that is a claiming and mood enhancer [15,22-24]. Rhythmical knitting helps to mediate the heartbeat and thus also brought calming effect [16]. Moreover, those movements helped to enhance the upper extremity functions and muscle strength [25] and training the patience of participants: "Since my fingers' movement is not flexible before... but when (I) continue to knit, (I) find that my fingers' movement is more flexible recently and I am being more patient because of repeated movement." "Usually, I just use one finger to play the mobile phone, but now I utilize all five fingers. This can improve my flexible of the fingers' movements." Majority of the participants claimed that they continued to do finger knitting after the workshop and they tried to find information and new stitches from Internet or books. Some of them recommended this workshop to their friends and request for further workshop. They found that the workshop was useful and suitable for many people. A lady said that most people nowadays were always playing mobile phone, even when they were at home, so finger knitting was a very good alternative for them.

Self-confidence and Satisfaction

People generally believed that having high self-esteem provided countless advantages and let people had positive views of themselves, for example having high esteem might cause people view themselves more attractive and superior [26]. Also, according to Crocker & Park's [27] research, the act of pursuing self-esteem already brought benefits to people. Improving self-esteem was thus one of the major objective and theme of this workshop. More than a half of the participants claimed that they were not having confidence and afraid of failure. Some of them said they would not join any art therapy due to lack of confidence and skills in art making. When they first come across finger knitting, they had no idea with it and thought that it was difficult and required much technique as traditional knitting. Nevertheless, after the first session, they all changed their mind and thought that it was "easy to learn". This kind of easy learning activity help to arouse a sense of achievement pleasantly while avoiding negative effect due to failure in learning: "(I) think that using needles for knitting is very difficult, it requires many skills and time-consuming. Now doing finger knitting, (I) think that it is easy and quick. Thus, I think I am

smart." Although a few of them find that it is a bit difficult to handle at the beginning, after the first session, they all grasp the skill and even said that it was amazing. They all then perform well and able to accomplish their knit products within four sessions. Several participants completed their products earlier than expected and learned new stitches that were not planned:

"Sometimes (I) may knit it wrongly and have to start again. However, when you continue to knit, you will become more skillful and (your) self-confidence will be boost." For instance, a male participant who grasped the skill relatively slower than others thought that finger knitting provided him a chance to learn new things step-by-step. Especially, due to the tardiness and a bit behind the progress at the beginning, he felt even higher achievement when he was able to complete the product: "From a yarn to a knitted handbag, the sense of achievement is so great. Also, it is a gradually increasing sense of achievement." Previous research also suggested that self-esteem was crucial to mental health and highly related to emotional states, such as happiness [26], anxiety [28], hostility [29] and so on. Furthermore, goal fulfillment (creation of a knit product here) facilitated self-worth since achievement attribution had an affective impact that often makes people feel happy, proud and relaxed [30,31]. These embodied in the workshop as participants said: "After completing the knit product and looking at it, (I) feel happy and satisfied." They were all very satisfied with the workshop and felt happy and enjoyable: "I think that this activity is quite playful and the content is easy to learn. Overall, the whole process is very jolly." "With a few easy steps, (I) can get the finished product. I feel satisfied." Self-esteem not just consisted of performance and achievement, but also social self-esteem. Participants did not know each other at the beginning; nevertheless, they all became friends after the workshops. One of the participant was introverted and being quiet at the first session. She claimed that she still felt comfortable and being accepted even when she was quiet within group when knitting. Later, she made friend with other participants and felt that she was not alone anymore. More benefits for the social aspect would be demonstrated on the third theme.

Social Involvement

The finger knitting workshop led to enhanced social involvement and thus improved social confidence of participants as suggested by previous research [15,17]. It provided an opportunity for social connection as it brought people with similar interests together. This time, finger knitting became their common topic that helped to build a sense of cohesion and belongings among participants. During the workshop, sense of ease of communication was promoted as it enabled free chatting and acceptable eye contact without causing a sense of hostile [15]. Also, as mentioned, being quiet was acceptable during finger knitting. Hence, it provided a safe environment for participants even they do not know each other deeply. As a result, social confidence would be improved, especially for participants who were afraid of being in group situation or being shy of new friends.

What is more, finger knitting workshop promoted mutual support and sharing. Mutual recognition and appreciation were

obviously observed. Participants were praised for other works and they never being stingy to encourage slow-learning participants. It was also very encouraging that comparison with others was minimized while sharing of skills was always took place. As mentioned by a participant: "It helps to improve communication since it is a group-learning. If there is anything that is not quite understood, (we) can ask others or teach each other. There is an opportunity for communication." Therefore, it is obvious that finger knitting workshop provided a friendly and warmth environment, where smile and laugh were always found. This kind of positive feeling might also influence the participants in group. Some participants claimed that even they were being upset; they would forget it quickly during the workshop. Willison & Masson's [33] study suggested that appropriate touching produced positive therapeutic impact. Teaching and sharing knitting might enable acceptable touch between people. This might bring a feeling of warmth and comfort and eventually gave a therapeutic effect.

Active Lifestyle and Productivity

As mentioned, having a hobby could improve quality of life and well-being. Finger knitting could be developed into a hobby obviously and this demonstrated in the finger knitting group that most of them developed it into an interest that they would continue to knit. Also, everyone could do this activity across his/her lifespan [11,16]. They could design their own products and explore new knitting methods. Knitting, also as a type of fashion design method, required planning and preparation. People have to think of the materials, patterns, stitches and costs. This might also improve people's ability of management and foster personal growth. As a female participant mentioned that she had calculated the time and yarns needed and thus planned and made use of her time. She claimed that her time was being enriched due to better planning. Participants also found that finger knitting was a good hobby to be developed, as knitting was productive and meaningful that they could have a knit product as well: "Apart from relaxing during finger knitting, there is a final product by finger knitting. (I) think that it is very useful." More than a half of the participants mentioned that they had certain degree of personal growth, such as being patience and even able to being multi-tasking: "Knitting requires repeated movements that can trains our patient and perseverance." "When (I am) finger knitting, (I) can do other thing at the same time... can trained to be able to being multi-tasking." Furthermore, knit products were usually used for charity purpose or utilized as a gift to other. This type of act might improve people's self-worth. A male participant claimed that he gave the knit handbag to his girl friend as a present. He was happy and having higher self-confidence when his girl friend accepted the present pleasantly. Overall, there was a general agreement among participants that they enjoyed the workshop and found lost of benefits brought by finger knitting. They also showed high satisfaction and having positive change.

Conclusion

Nowadays, city dwellers are striving for high efficiency that let them live with high pressure and negative emotion. Hence, their mental health situation is not acceptable. Nevertheless, there are

limited effective ways for them to relax their stress and cope with their mental health problems, such as insomnia. Hence, art therapy becomes popular, even its effectiveness is still uncertain. This study focused on finger knitting, which is more easy-to-learn and have more benefits. After four session workshops, participants were all satisfied with the workshop and found it helpful. There were four major themes suggested, including

- a) calming and relaxation effect.
- b) self-confidence and satisfaction.
- c) social involvement and
- d) active lifestyle and productivity.

It was found that finger knitting helped to reduce negative mood by calming effect and improve people's self-esteem. They were able to develop a sense of belonging and promote a positive change in life. However, this study was only a pilot study that explores the potential help of finger knitting in mental health and self-esteem. Further studies with more participants are needed to investigate the actual help and validate the accuracy of results. Especially, participants were general public without great mental health problems. Hence, for further study, incorporating participants with different degree of mental health problems or various backgrounds may be needed. That means demographics data and control group should be studied for analysis. The level of difficulties of finger knitting may also be an important factor affecting the help. Creative and design elements may be added for next workshop to facilitate self-expression as well. It is clear that there are still many possibilities for study since developing finger knitting as a therapy is relatively a new concept. Nonetheless, it deserves study due to numerous benefits mentioned.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The study involves human subjects and all of them have signed the informed consent before participating in the study.

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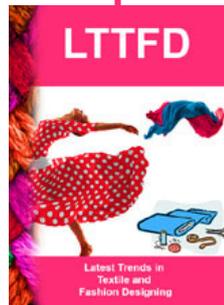
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