Have you Laughed Today? : the Effect of Laughter Therapy on Human Health

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Have you Laughed Today? : the Effect of Laughter Therapy on Human Health

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I. Introduction

1. Background of the Study

In the 13th century, some surgeons relieved patients’ pains by making them laugh. Later, in the 20th century, scientific studies began to explore the healing power of laughter. In fact, it was claimed by Norman Cousin, an American political journalist, author, professor and world peace advocate. He mentioned the idea related to laughter therapy in his 1979 book Anatomy of an Illness. In 1995, Kataria, an Indian doctor, created laughter yoga. Little by little, many laughter clubs were founded all over the world.

Laughter therapy is often referred to as humor therapy. In recent years, there has been increasing successful cases in laughter therapy. Medical researchers also have shown an increased interest in laughter therapy.

2. Motivation of the Study

Have you laughed today? Laughter can make you feel better about yourself and the world around you. Laughing is considered to be a way of communication and expressing our emotions. One day, we saw a group of people laughing without particular reasons in the park. In the beginning, we thought that they just laughed aimlessly. Recently, we saw some reports which described laughter therapy and its successful cases. As a result, we suddenly recall the group of people laughing in the park, wondering whether they were conducting laughter therapy at that time. And we also want to know what the so-called laughter therapy is?

Some people say that the cheapest medicine today is laughter. When you laugh, no other negative thought comes to mind. How amazing the power of laughing! Thus, we decide to choose laughter therapy as the subject of our report.

3. Purpose of the Study

It seems difficult for people with chronic illnesses to laugh out loud all the time. However, laughing can be a helpful way to relieve physical and mental discomfort. Now, Laughter Therapy has become much more common in Taiwan. Yet, most people have some misunderstanding about laughter therapy due to the lack of proper knowledge of laughter therapy. Therefore, in this report, we would like to break the misconceptions of laughter therapy, and further explore the benefits of laughter therapy. Finally, the limitations of laughter therapy will also be discussed. Through the report,
we hope to provide the general public with a sound knowledge of laughter therapy, encourage people to laugh more, and have a better quality of life.

4. Research Questions

To understand more about laughter therapy, we decide to explore some knowledge about it as follows:

RQ1: What are the misconceptions about laughter therapy?
RQ2: What are the benefits of laughter therapy?
RQ3: What are the limitations of laughter therapy?

II. Thesis

A. Laughter therapy

1. Methods

1-1 Participants

200 students were randomly recruited from Tainan station. The students were divided into two groups based on their gender. Just over half the sample (64%) was female, of whom 35% were male, and of whom 1% did not show their gender in the questionnaire.

1-2 Instruments

It was considered that quantitative measures would usefully supplement and extend the qualitative analysis. In this study, a questionnaire was used to explore the first research question1 what are the misconceptions about laughter therapy? For the purpose of analysis, participants’ background information, such as gender, ages and so forth, were obtained from Part I in the questionnaire. The conceptions of laughter therapy were explored through Part II in the questionnaire. The effects of laughter therapy were investigated by Part III in the questionnaire.

2. Misconception about laughter therapy

Figure 1 shows that the proportion of people knowing laughter therapy is higher than the proportion of people having no ideas about laughter therapy. However, for
those who hear of laughter therapy, they still have misconceptions about laughter therapy. The following are the most common misconceptions pointed out from our questionnaires:

![Figure 1 Do you know what laughter therapy is?](image1)

Q1. Is laughter therapy a treatment confirmed by medical research?

Figure 2 shows that over half of the participants (61%) felt that laughter therapy is a confirmed treatment. On the other hands, 35% of the participants said that laughter therapy is an unconfirmed treatment.

Turning now to the experimental evidence on laughter therapy, many researchers have proved that laughter therapy is a good medical treatment. One of the researches from Japan has shown that laughter therapy is an efficient low-cost medical treatment. Kazuo Murakami (2011), a Japanese geneticist, also considers that laughter is a stimulant which can boost energy and help cure some diseases. "A laughing therapy has no side-effect, meaning it is an epoch-making treatment for clinical medicine," he said.

![Figure 2 Is laughter therapy a treatment confirmed by medical research?](image2)

Q2. Does fake laughter do our health good?

Figure 3 shows that 79% of the participants felt that fake laughter doesn’t do our health good. On the contrary, 19% of the participants thought that fake laughter does
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do our health good.

In fact, since our bodies can’t distinguish between real laughter and fake laughter, both of which have positive effect on us. In addition, laughter yoga is also based on this conception. One of the studies conducted in 2003 by a psychologist professor, Charles Schaefer (2009), at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, New Jersey, demonstrated clearly that even fake laughter can significantly boost mood and psychological well-being.

Q3. Can laughter therapy be practiced anywhere?

As can been seen from Figure 4, 79% of the participants felt that laughter therapy can be practiced anywhere. However, 20% of the participants felt that laughter therapy can’t be practiced anywhere.

A Swiss psychologist, Treece, mentions laughter therapy as one of the most popular treatments for people, because laughter therapy can be practiced everywhere as long as people are willing to give it a try.
Q4: Except for human beings, do animals use laughter therapy?

Shown in Figure 5, 57% of the participants felt that except for human beings, animals are also able to use laughter therapy. On the other hand, 40% of the participants said that except for human beings, animals are not able to use laughter therapy.

The pie charts above show some misconceptions on laughter therapy. One of the common misconceptions is that laughter is unique to human beings. In fact, it is not the case. Virtually all mammals can laugh. So, both of human beings and mammals, such as mousse, dogs, cats, and gorillas can put laughter therapy into practice.

Figure 5 Except for human beings, do animals use laughter therapy?

3. Development status

There are more than 5,000 laughter clubs around the world, and India contains 3,000 clubs. People can see laughter clubs in the parks or streets. In Taiwan, more and more laughter clubs are established. The following are the three main patterns of applying laughing to human life.

3-1 Laughter Yoga

Laughter Yoga requires no outer stimulation or humor to make people laugh. Laughter yoga promotes a natural laughter, so it’s also called “no reason to laugh.” In recent years, scientific research and application of laughter in medical circle frequently refer to the "no reason to laugh." Laughter Yoga combines Yogic Breathing, transporting more oxygen around the body and the brain, which help people to be filled with more energy. No matter it is real or fake laughter, people can get physiological and psychological benefits.
3-2 Smile power

Smile power belongs to no reason to laugh which comes from Taiwan. It combines laughter with qigong. It use the method of taking a deeply breath, being out of breathe, and relaxing yourself at the same time you can get a lot of oxygen. The cells obtain enough oxygen to activation, then the body will become healthy. Smile power and laughter yoga have a lot in common; for this reason, it would be very suitable to put both of them into practice.

3-3 Dramas and games

Funny dramas, stories, or games are believed to make you laugh. They can help you not only release your psychological pressure but also relieve your physical pains. Because this pattern of laughing has something to do with external stimulation such as dramas and games, it is so-called “Have a reason to laugh.” In early years, eastern medical studies on laughter therapy were based on this pattern of laughing to promote people to laugh out loud.

B. Benefits

1. Benefits of Laughter

The results obtained from our analysis are shown in Figure 6. It is apparent from this figure that the majority of participants (19.30%) think “Look much younger” is the most possible benefit of laughing. On the other hand, a minority of participants (6.40%) consider laughing can prevent them from getting cancer. According to the medical research and experimental evidence on laughter therapy nowadays, laughter can reach the following benefits to certain degree.

Smile is believed to be Vitamin S, which is an indispensable nutrient for human beings. The following are the main benefits of laughter.
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Figure 6 What are the benefits of laughter therapy?

1-1 Relieve pain

The laughter therapist indicated that if you laugh 15 minutes a day, you will be able to relieve more pains than average. In the 20th century, an American doctor also found that laughter can stimulate human brain to secret a natural anesthetic—endorphins. In addition, whenever people laugh 15 seconds, they are likely to add two more days to their life span. Whenever they laugh 45 seconds, they are likely to prevent themselves from having high blood pressure, and be free from their psychological stress. If people can laugh 1 minute, it will have the same effect of doing 15-minute exercise.

1-2 Stimulate the heart and lungs

Laughing makes human heart beat faster, improve blood circulation, and bring more oxygen into the body. The process of laughing increases the working of cardiac muscles and vessels as well as the cardiac output of blood. Since laughing can help circulate the oxygen to the working muscle and transport waste away from cardiac muscles and vessels, it can keep blood from clotting.

1-3 Improve mental functions

For people who laugh at all times, their brain cells tend to be highly activated and slow the process of ageing. What’s more, their creativity springs up more often than those who seldom laugh. Their memories are also better and last longer than people who rarely laugh.

1-4 Boost immune system and prevent cancer
There is a natural anti-cell in human body. Whenever people laugh, they strengthen the energy of the anti-cell, and improve immune system naturally. Apart from daily laughter, a balanced diet and healthy genes help decrease the risk of getting a cancer.

1-5 Look much younger

When people laugh, their face will flush, sweat and be hot. Laughing makes not only the skin pores cleaned but also the face rosy. Since laughing makes human beings mentally and physically healthier, it helps them look much younger than those who rarely laugh.

1-6 Balance blood pressure

Laughing can decrease the blood pressure caused by the concentration of hormone in blood. Thus, people feel much more relaxed after laughing. Dr Lee Berk, a researcher at Loma Linda University in California, conducted an experiment that had some people watch a tragedy while others watch a comedy. The result of the research showed that the blood pressure of those who watched a comedy tend to be lower by 10mm (Hg) to 20mm (Hg) after 10 minutes laughter.

1-7 Enhance the function of respiratory system

The process of laughing allows more stress to enter the chest wall, stretching the chest muscles, distending the lung-thorax, and increase lung capacities. For this reason, laughing can help enhance the function of respiratory system.

C. Limitations

1. Limitations of Laughter Therapy

Although laughter therapy owns so many advantages, it has some limitations for people who are not appropriate to practice it. The following are the situations that are not suitable for people to practice laughter therapy.

1-1 Cardiac surgery
For people who have some symptoms such as palpitation, tight chest, etc, they shouldn’t practice laughter therapy without asking physicians. Moreover, after conducting a cardiac surgery, they are not allowed to do laughter therapy in at least three months. The reason is that when you have not completely recovered from the surgery, laughing will add pressure to the cardiac muscles, causing the surgical wound to tear again. Thus, it is better not to practice laughter therapy after having a cardiac surgery.

1-2 Pregnancy

For pregnant women, practicing laughter therapy is most likely to enhance the pressure of their bellies, which may increase the risk of miscarriage. For this reason, it has been suggested that pregnant women avoid doing laughter therapy.

1-3 Serious backache

For people who have a serious backache, they are likely to have some problems on their intervertebral disc. Consequently, it is better not to practice laughter therapy when suffering a serious backache. The reason is that when people laugh, their bodies usually tend to move forwards and backwards. Such motion is believed to do their intervertebral disc a lot of harm.

1-4 Flu

When people get flu, it is most possible to infect another person. When doing laughter therapy, people usually have to laugh and interact with other people. However, it is face-to-face interaction and the process of laughing together that increase the risk of infecting other people. For this reason, it has been suggested that ill people take a rest at home instead of doing laughter therapy in the public place.

III. Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that approximately half of the participants do not know what laughter therapy is. The purpose of the current study is to clarify some misconceptions on laughter therapy, and to provide people with further information such as the benefits and limitations of laughter therapy. In fact, laughter therapy is a treatment confirmed by medical research. No matter it is real laugh or fake laugh, both of them can bring benefits to humans. What’s more, not only can human beings practice laughter therapy, but also animals can practice it.
This study will serve as a base for further studies and enhance our understanding of laughter therapy. Laughing is widely considered a good habit that we have never imagined. Therefore, we suggest that further studies involving the most effective pattern of laughter therapy should be undertaken. Since there are many benefits from laughing, let’s laugh out loud to live longer and happier.

IV. References

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VI. Questionnaires

I. Personal Information

Dear respondents,

We are the students from the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, HHVS. We are conducting a report, and our research topic is “laughter therapy”. This questionnaire is used to further understand the extent of people’s knowledge about laughter therapy.

This questionnaire is used to academic research and data analyze. We won’t reveal any of your personal information to the public. Please feel free to answer the following questions. Thank you very much.

By Winnie, Wenty and Lynn
October 2011

1. Your Gender
   - (1) male
   - (2) female

2. Your age
   - (1) 10~20
   - (2) 21~30
   - (3) 31~40
   - (4) 41~50
   - (5) Over 51

3. Do you know what laughter therapy is?
   - (1) Yes
   - (2) No (If your answer is No, you don’t need to answer NO.4. Thanks!)

4. How do you know laughter therapy?
   - (1) News report
   - (2) International information
   - (3) Friend’s introduction
   - (4) Self-experience or Family’s experience
   - (5) Newspapers and magazines
   - (6) Others ________________

II. Conceptions of Laughter Therapy

1. Is laughter therapy a treatment confirmed by medical research?
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□ (1) Yes  □ (2) No
2. Does laughing do your health good?
□ (1) Yes  □ (2) No
3. Does fake laughter do our health good?
□ (1) Yes  □ (2) No
4. Can laughter therapy be practiced anywhere?
□ (1) Yes  □ (2) No
5. Except for human beings, do animals use laughter therapy?
□ (1) Yes  □ (2) No

III. The Effect of Laugh Therapy

1. Can laughter therapy help prevent people from some diseases?
□ (1) Yes  □ (2) No
2. What are the benefits of laughter therapy?
(You can choose more than one answer.)
□ (1) Stimulate the heart and lung
□ (2) Relieve pains
□ (3) Boost the immune system and prevent cancer
□ (4) Balance blood pressure
□ (5) Enhance the function of respiratory tract
□ (6) Become wiser
□ (7) Look younger
□ (8) Others ________________