



RHYTHMS OF CONNECTION: Music Therapy (Afrocentric) Intervention to Slow Cognitive Decline in Nigerian Older Adults

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• Afrocentric
Music Therapy

• Mild Cognitive
Impairment (MCI)

• Cognitive
Resilience

• Emotional
Well-being

• Cultural
Relevance

• Community-Based
Intervention

• Low-Cost &
Scalable

• Dementia
Prevention

BACKGROUND

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) represents a critical pre-dementia stage where early psycho-social interventions can delay cognitive decline and strengthen emotional resilience. In Nigeria, culturally resonant and scalable non-pharmacological strategies remain limited.

Afrocentric music therapy, incorporating indigenous rhythms, familiar songs, movement, and communal participation, offers a culturally relevant, low-stigma, emotionally engaging approach to support both older adults at risk of dementia and their care partners.

Evidence from previous studies suggests that music therapy engages multiple cognitive, emotional, and social processes simultaneously, making it a promising non-pharmacological strategy for promoting healthy ageing and reducing dementia risk.

However, evidence from culturally adapted interventions in sub-Saharan Africa remains limited.

METHODS

- A pilot randomized controlled trial was conducted across four locations: Chief Tony Anenih Geriatrics Centre, University College Hospital, Ibadan, and Beere, Oje, and Yemetu communities in Ibadan, Oyo State.
- Sixty community-dwelling older adults with Mild Cognitive Impairment were randomly assigned to an immediate intervention or wait-list control group.
- The 9-week intervention involved weekly 60-minute group sessions combining rhythmic movement, sing-alongs of culturally familiar songs, and structured social interaction.
- Feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary efficacy were assessed using standardized psychometric tools (GDS, HADS-A, DRS, ZBI-12).

STUDY DESIGN

Design	Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial
Sites	4 community and clinical sites
Participants	60 older adults with MCI
Duration	9 weeks
Session	Weekly, 60 minutes
Intervention	Afrocentric music therapy
Analysis	Correlation and paired t-test

RESULTS

- Recruitment and retention were high ($\geq 85\%$), confirming strong feasibility. Participants described the sessions as "healing," "bonding," and "joyful."
- Quantitative analysis showed promising preliminary efficacy:
 - Greater session attendance was significantly correlated with improved emotional well-being ($r = 0.602, p < 0.05$).
 - Reduced depressive symptoms ($r = 0.528, p < 0.05$).
 - Enhanced relationship quality ($r = 0.541, p < 0.05$).
- Paired t-tests revealed significant reductions in GDS and HADS-A scores from baseline to post-intervention ($p < .01$).
- Care partners reported significantly reduced burden (ZBI-12) and improved relational harmony (DRS) compared to the wait-list control ($p < .05$).
- Preliminary observations also suggested favourable trends in cognitive functioning following the intervention, with detailed analyses of DRS outcomes ongoing.

CONCLUSION

An Afrocentric music-based intervention is feasible, culturally acceptable, and demonstrates significant preliminary benefits for cognitive, emotional, and relational well-being among older adults with MCI and their care partners in Nigeria.

These findings support further large-scale RCTs to evaluate long-term outcomes and integration of music-based therapy into dementia prevention and public health frameworks across Africa.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- ✓ Supports culturally adapted dementia prevention strategies.
- ✓ Demonstrates feasibility of community-based music therapy.
- ✓ Provides evidence for integrating music therapy into geriatric care.
- ✓ Supports larger multi-centre randomized controlled trials across Africa.

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