

Evaluating Touch in Participatory Art Programs for Older Adults



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Driven to DiscoverSM

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Background

KAIROS ALIVE! Dancing Heart™ program engages frail elders and their caregivers in dance theatre, music and storytelling as a catalyst for exercises in movement, memory and socialization. Trained professional artists facilitate weekly sessions at various sites. While research in the field of Creative Arts & Aging is emerging, preliminary findings suggest that participatory art programs in elderly populations are beneficial¹⁻³.

Studies have shown that dancing and playing music decrease the risk of dementia and disease burden in the elderly.

Activity	Hazard Ratio for Dementia (95% CI)
Dancing	0.24 (0.06–0.99)
Playing a musical instrument	0.31 (0.11–0.90)
Walking	0.67 (0.45–1.05)
Doing housework	0.88 (0.60–1.20)

Participated in these activities more than once per week. Hazard ratios adjusted for age, sex, educational level, presence or absence of medical illnesses, score on the Blessed Information-Memory-Concentration test, and participation or nonparticipation in other leisure activities⁴

KAIROS was interested in understanding how participants and artists engaged one another through the use of touch and how this impacted their well-being. The veteran population identified for this project was chosen based on KAIROS' long-standing history with them and their recent attentiveness to the use of touch.

Studies on the use of touch between caregiver and patient have found:

- Touch has a comforting and calming effect
- Individual experiences of touch vary by gender, age, and part of body involved
- Frequency of touch is influenced by gender, age, and past experiences
- Touch can be experienced positively or negatively
- Touch does not affect measurable physiological signs of patient.⁵

Methods

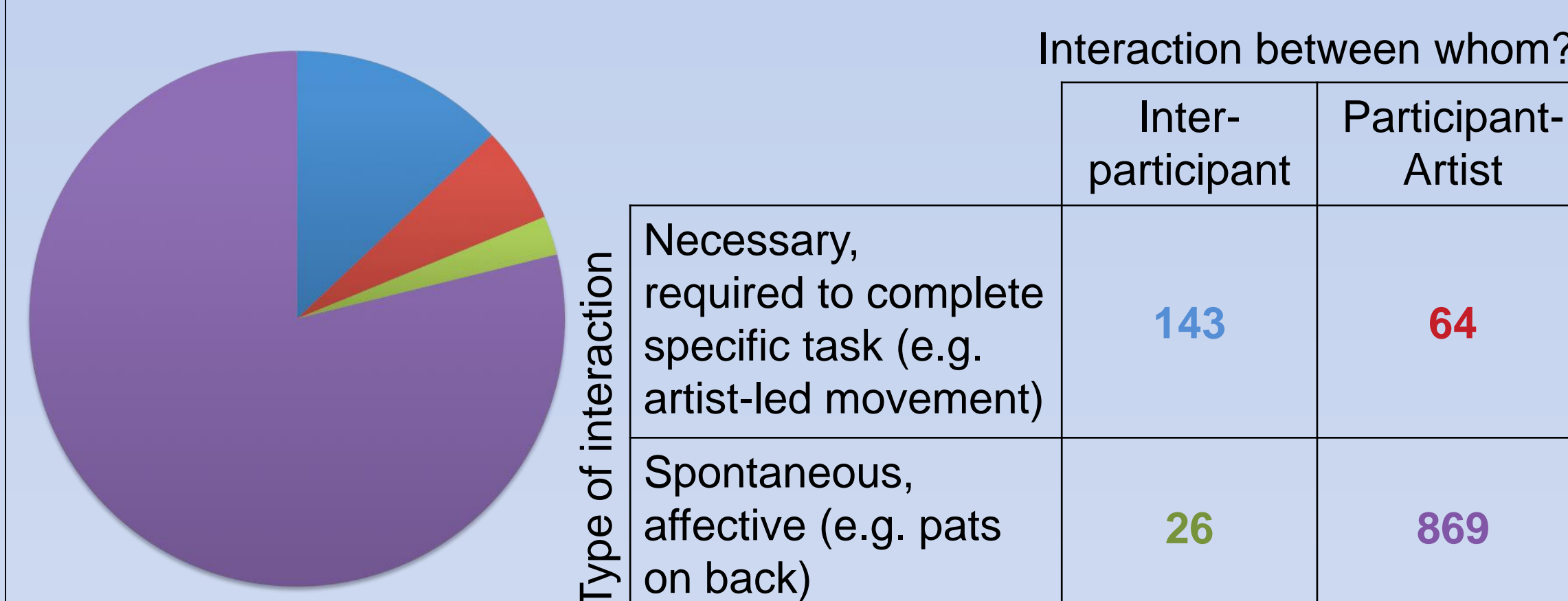
We performed a combination of observation, participation and interviews at the KAIROS Dancing Heart sessions at the VA Adult Day Health Care Program in Richfield, MN.

- Participants: 30 older adults at the Federal VA day program who join the Thursday morning Dancing Hearts session
- Analysis: Tally-based analysis of different types of touch used to facilitate participant interaction, one-on-one interviews with participants, including these questions:
 - What are your thoughts after this session?
 - Our project is focusing on touch. Have you thought about the use of touch in these sessions?
 - What did you notice about touch during specific activities?



Results

Number of single touch interactions over 8 sessions from 9/26/13 – 12/4/13

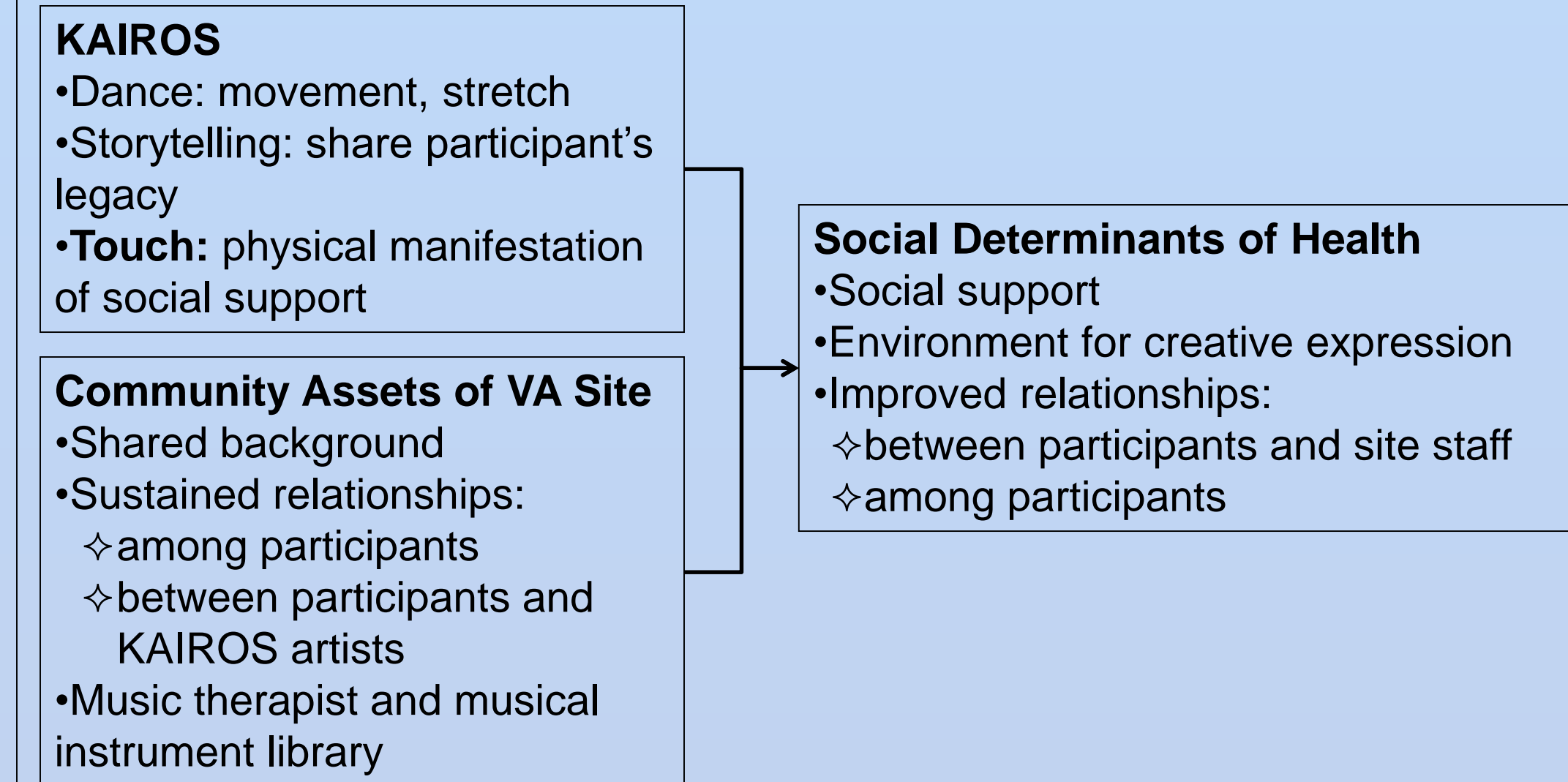


Responses from participant interviews:

- “Touch is a sign of friendship”
- “KAIROS is unique...not many other programs here use touch”
- “Dance reminds me of growing up, it is like marching in the military”
- “If people thought it was hokey, they wouldn't come back. But everyone comes back.”

Discussion

KAIROS considers touch just one part of their multifaceted sessions.



The majority of touch was spontaneous and affective, occurring between participants and artists at the beginning and end of sessions. Certain activities had a higher incidence of spontaneous touch between participants. These included exercises in imagination, such as helping a neighbor put on sunscreen, acting like wolves, or retelling a hunting folk story in movement and song. Most participants said that touch was naturally integrated into the sessions and they had positive feelings about this. To them, touch was an outward expression of camaraderie. We feel that touch bolsters this population's already strong sense of community. Our hope is that this information can be used to strengthen interpersonal relationships and community identity at future KAIROS sites.

Acknowledgements and References

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