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Long-term Improvements in Older Adults' Pragmatic Communication: a Controlled Evaluation of the Advanced Cognitive Pragmatic Treatment

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Abstract

As the global population ages and pragmatic ability declines in late adulthood, interventions supporting pragmatic competence become increasingly relevant for maintaining satisfying relationships in senescence. This study evaluates the effectiveness of the Advanced Cognitive Pragmatic Treatment (Advanced-CPT) in enhancing pragmatic communication in healthy older adults aged 65-86 years. Fifty-two participants were pseudo-randomly assigned to either the Advanced-CPT training group (n=26) or a control group (n=26) engaging in unstructured social activities. Improvements in pragmatic performance were expected only in the training group, without effects on other cognitive functions, such as executive functions (EFs) or Theory of Mind (ToM). Participants were assessed at baseline (T0), immediately after the intervention (T1), and three months post-intervention (T2) using the Assessment Battery for Communication (ABaCo; Bosco et al., 2012) and tasks evaluating cognitive functions (e.g., EFs and ToM). A repeated-measures ANOVA on ABaCo total score revealed significant effects of Assessment Time ($F(2,49)=15.29$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.38$) and a significant Assessment Time \times Group interaction ($F(2,49)=8.84$, $p<.001$; $\eta^2=.27$). Post-hoc analyses showed significant improvement in Advanced-CPT group from T0 to T1 ($p<.001$), with gains maintained at T2 ($p<.001$), whereas the control group showed no improvement at T1 ($p=.186$) and a decline at T2 ($p<.001$). No significant changes emerged for EFs and ToM in either group ($p>.05$), indicating the specificity of treatment effects to pragmatic ability. These results suggest Advanced-CPT is an effective and long-lasting intervention for enhancing pragmatic competence in healthy ageing.

Keywords: Ageing; Cognitive; Decline; Pragmatics; Training.