

## A Study on Poetry Therapy: Exploring the Functions and Capacities of Persian Poetry

Manijeh Firoozi<sup>1</sup>

Elaheh Karimi Riabi<sup>2</sup>

### Extended Abstract

#### Introduction

Poetry therapy, an art-based therapeutic approach, involves the intentional and harmonious reading of poems, either individually or in groups, with a focus on metaphorical imagery and the extraction of deeper meanings from poetic texts. This creative method offers unique benefits and has been recognized as a flexible alternative, especially in cases where rigid psychotherapeutic frameworks prove ineffective. Given its potential, this study sought to investigate the scope and application of poetry therapy by analyzing articles published in Farsi and English. To achieve this, an extensive review of literature was conducted using reputable academic databases with keywords such as poetry therapy, writing therapy, poem therapy, and their Persian equivalents. The findings are discussed in detail based on initial screening and analysis.

#### Aim

The findings indicate that poetry therapy has been utilized across diverse fields, including psychology, medicine, and neuroscience. The methodologies adopted in studies range from quantitative approaches (e.g., experimental and quasi-experimental studies) to qualitative methods (e.g., case studies), as well as mixed-method approaches such as the analysis of participants' poetic compositions and group exercises. While poetry therapy has been implemented both individually and in group settings, group interventions have been predominant. To ensure the validity and reliability of therapeutic sessions, structured frameworks and session patterns were designed, some of which are introduced in this study. In addition to examining international research, this study also explores the status of poetry therapy in Iran, highlighting its opportunities and challenges within the cultural and academic

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding Author) [mfiroozy@ut.ac.ir](mailto:mfiroozy@ut.ac.ir)

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of Russian Studies, Department of Russian Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran [ekarimi@ut.ac.ir](mailto:ekarimi@ut.ac.ir)

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landscape. Persian poetry, with its rich literary tradition, offers unique capacities for therapeutic exploration, yet these remain underutilized in formal psychological frameworks.

#### Discussion

Despite the apparent synergies between literature and psychology, significant challenges hinder their integration. One major obstacle is methodological divergence; literary analysis and psychological research operate within distinct frameworks, often leading to discrepancies in interpretation and application. Furthermore, the subjective and interpretative nature of literature sometimes clashes with psychology's empirical demands, raising concerns about validity and reliability. Bridging this gap necessitates structured interdisciplinary dialogue between literary scholars and psychologists, enabling collaborative research and practical applications. Addressing these challenges is essential to advancing our understanding of the reciprocal influences between literature and psychology and leveraging these insights to tackle real-world issues related to identity, emotion, and cognition.

The therapeutic use of poetry has deep historical roots. For centuries, stories and poems have been employed as tools to heal emotional wounds. For example, Irvin Yalom's use of therapeutic narratives to alleviate existential distress, particularly the fear of death, exemplifies the power of literary tools in psychological healing. However, poetry therapy has not always been recognized as a legitimate therapeutic method. During much of the 20th century, it was often dismissed as unscientific or overly abstract. Despite these challenges, its development gained momentum in the latter half of the 20th century. An examination of the literature reveals a surge in research during the late 20th century and early 21st century, with notable expansion into non-Western countries in the second decade of the 21st century.

The incorporation of neuroscience into poetry therapy has further accelerated its acceptance. Studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing patients' quality of life, leading to its recognition as a complementary therapeutic approach. Beyond psychological applications, poetry therapy has shown efficacy in medical and health-related fields, suggesting its versatility.

A detailed analysis of research methodologies revealed that studies in poetry therapy often employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. Quantitative approaches, while useful for establishing empirical validity, fail to capture the nuanced and subjective experiences central to poetry therapy. Qualitative studies, such as case studies, provide deeper insights into individual and group dynamics but may lack generalizability. Mixed-method approaches, which integrate quantitative and qualitative elements, offer a more comprehensive understanding of the capacities and limitations of poetry therapy. Despite the progress in this field, several methodological inconsistencies persist. For instance, the number of sessions and group sizes in studies often appear arbitrary, with little explanation of their rationale. Dropout rates among participants are rarely reported, and the selection criteria for study samples

lack uniformity. Addressing these gaps is essential to improving the robustness and reliability of future research.

One of the most significant limitations of poetry therapy is its reliance on cultural and linguistic contexts. Poems are deeply rooted in the literary and cultural traditions of their respective societies, and their therapeutic potential depends heavily on how well they resonate with participants' cultural backgrounds. In countries like Iran, where poetry holds a central place in cultural identity, the therapeutic potential of poetry is immense. Persian poetry, with its profound themes of spirituality, love, and existential reflection, offers a wealth of material for psychological exploration. However, adapting these poetic resources for structured therapeutic use requires culturally sensitive frameworks. The appendix of this study provides examples of Persian poetry's unique capacities and proposes the development of innovative techniques to harness these capacities effectively.

The acceptance of poetry therapy has grown over time, driven by its adaptability and the evolving understanding of art-based therapies. The method has shown promise not only in psychological settings but also in improving physical health and cognitive well-being. This trend suggests that poetry therapy has the potential to expand into other domains, such as education, where its application could foster emotional intelligence, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Moving forward, efforts should focus on addressing the methodological shortcomings identified in current research. Standardized session designs, clear criteria for participant selection, and culturally adapted techniques are critical for ensuring the reliability and effectiveness of poetry therapy. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration between psychologists, literary scholars, and neuroscientists can provide new insights into how poetry influences the brain and emotions, paving the way for more innovative applications.

#### Conclusion

Poetry therapy represents a promising and evolving field at the intersection of art, psychology, and culture. Despite challenges in methodology and cultural adaptation, its growing acceptance highlights its potential as a flexible and effective therapeutic tool. By leveraging the unique capacities of poetic traditions and fostering interdisciplinary research, poetry therapy can address a wide range of emotional, cognitive, and social challenges.

With continued exploration and refinement, this method has the potential to make significant contributions not only to mental health but also to broader fields such as education and complementary medicine.

**Keywords:** Poetry, Poetry Therapy, Group Therapy, Persian Poetry.

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