

# Dealing Out the Truth: The Perceived Benefits of Playing Card Games in Older Adults

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## Abstract

Card games are a popular pastime older adults participate in. However, the benefits gained by solely playing card games in their original form are not well known. 11 older adults in either assisted living or an independent residence were interviewed to explore their awareness of the benefits of playing card games regularly. Data analysis showed several themes including mental stimulation, social engagement, enjoyment, and entertainment. These various themes could also be viewed through the lenses of: perceived benefits of playing card games, value, motivation, and opportunity to play. This research could be beneficial to the field of Therapeutic Recreation to better understand how playing card games impacts older adults.

## Literature Review

### DEMOGRAPHICS AND MENTAL HEALTH:

- Mental health contributes to 6.6% of the disabilities within the older adult population.<sup>10</sup>
- Cognitive stimulating exercises or activities can either act as a protective measure or reduce the progression of cognitive diseases, such as dementia and Alzheimer's.<sup>1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9</sup>

### COGNITIVE EXERCISES IN CURRENT RESEARCH:

- Use of complex cognitive exercises, unlike drug trials, produced beneficial outcomes in older adults.<sup>7</sup>
- Direct relationship between increased cognitive activities and improvement in cognitive performance of older women.<sup>7</sup>
- Onset of dementia could be reduced by 15% when individuals engaged in board games.<sup>3</sup> Even with the introduction of more technological devices to offer digital games, individuals still perceived traditional board games to be more enjoyable.<sup>2</sup>
- Less participation in cognitive stimulating activities, like card games, doubled the chances of developing mental health diseases.<sup>9</sup>
- Participants recognized non-digitalized games, including card games, provided opportunities for social engagement, mental stimulation, enjoyment, and escape from life.<sup>5</sup>

## Research Question

The purpose of this research was to discover the effects playing card games had on older adults. Although previous research showed the benefits of various cognitively stimulating activities, it did not focus specifically on playing card games. Therefore, this research aimed to answer, what are the perceived benefits of playing card games in older adults?

## Research Participants & Methods

### PARTICIPANTS:

- 11 participants (9 female and 2 male) aged 72-97 years
- Recruited through posters and word of mouth from recreation department staff
- Fit inclusion criteria: 60yrs or older; played card games regularly and living in assisted or independent living

### METHODS:

- Qualitative, purposive sampling
- Semi-structured one to one interviews
- Audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Data analyzed through codebook

## Results

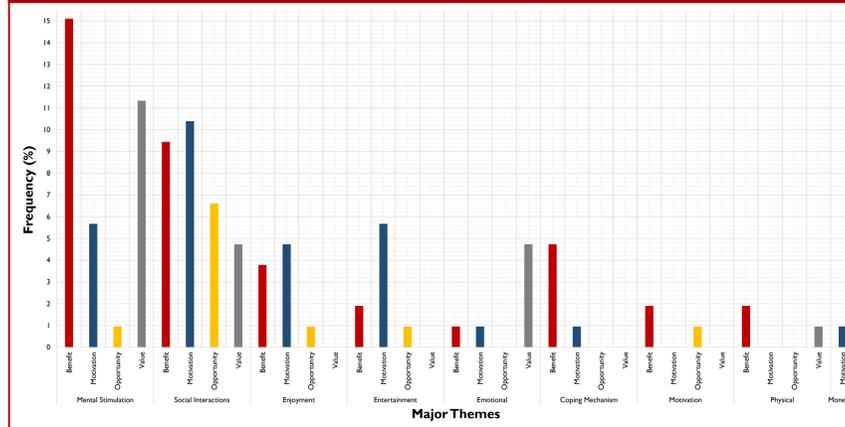


Figure 1. The frequency of the various lenses (benefits, motivation, opportunity and value) as related to the identified themes from interviews with older adults.



**Mental Stimulation (Value):**  
"I'm sure my kids would have never passed math, if we hadn't played Cribbage... All the numbers and letters involved in card games make you activate and keep your brain activated... Physical fitness is talked about all the time, but they forget about your head. You have to exercise the brain." –LLAPS

**Social Interactions (Benefit):**  
"You feel good when you're with people, it's nice to interact with others. I think if you're alone too much it's darker for you. So this way I'm interacting with other people quite a bit." –Rose

**Motivation (Opportunity):**  
"Well, I would be downstairs more and it would be something to get me out of the room and away from the couch" –Lily

**Physical (Value):**  
"... You have to use your hands to shuffle..." –Koalkwell

**Emotional (Value):**  
"Card games help your self-esteem... if you're good at it." –Bud

**Coping Mechanism (Benefit):**  
"I'm lonely and sometimes feel sad, but when I'm playing card games I forget. And that's good. So I go out and play blackjack and have lots of fun." –Daisy

**Entertainment (Reason):**  
"It's a form of entertainment to keep you from being bored and have something to do one day from the next." –Nainy

**Enjoyment (Opportunity):**  
"I want to have more enjoyment in my life with other people" –Daisy

Figure 2. Transcribed participant quotes identified in themes and further described through the various lenses.

## Discussion & Conclusion

- Nine themes distinguish the outcomes of playing card games within the data collection: social interactions, mental stimulation, enjoyment, entertainment, emotional, coping mechanism, motivation, physical and monetary.
- Overlap of findings from Mortenson et al. (2017).
- Some participants recognized multiple benefits card games provided them, whereas, other participants focused on one outcome.
- Participants identified card playing as a significant factor that increased their health; defined as social and mental well-being.
- Card games provide different benefits for individuals.
- Most individuals wanted more opportunities to play card games.

## Recommendations

This study highlighted other areas of improvement and new avenues for research to continue with card games. These include:

- Expand sample size.
  - Redefine age parameters and living situation.
  - Compare perceived outcomes to the level of difficulty the card games played by participants.
  - Examine the use of online card games and their impact on older adults.
- Overall there was a clear message given by all participants that there were many perceived positive outcomes of playing card games. Service providers and citizens should then:
- Implement more card game programs and opportunities for residents to play.
  - Everyone should learn or teach others how to play card games at any age.

## Acknowledgements

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Table 1. The list of card games played by participants in order of popularity.

Card Games			
1. Cribbage	5. Rummy	9. Skip Bo	13. Kings in the Corner
2. Solitaire	6. Hearts	10. 952	14. Rack-O
3. Blackjack	7. Poker	11. Euchre	15. Sets and Runs
4. Bridge	8. Whist	12. Hana Fuda	16. Thirty-One

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