

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Implementing Benson's Relaxation Therapy to Decrease Depression in Elderly

Irma Darmawati¹, Dhika Dharmansyah¹, Rofi Noviyanti², Slamet Rohaedi¹

¹ Nursing Program Study, Faculty of Sport and Health Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, 40154, Bandung, Indonesia.

² Rumah Sakit Paru Dr. H.A Rotinsulu, 140141, Bandung, Indonesia.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Depression in the elderly is caused by a lack of ability to adapt psychologically to problems and aging process changes. Depression can reduce the quality of life in the elderly. Benson's relaxation is thought to be effective in reducing depression. This research aims to see how Benson's relaxation affects the severity of depression in older people. **Methods:** This study is a quantitative study with a quasi-experimental design that took place in a nursing home. This research included 14 older people over the age of 60 who lives in Budi pertiwi nursing home in Bandung. Benson's relaxation was performed every day for 20 minutes in 3 weeks. This technique was performed by deep breath relaxation combined with religious beliefs espoused. The Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) was used to assess depression levels. The independent t-test was used as a comparative test to assess the mean difference between groups. **Results:** There was a significant effect ($p\text{-value} = 0.046 < 0.05$). In the elderly, depression levels have reduced after a three-week intervention. There was a change in depression from moderate depression to mild depression in 85.7% of the respondents. Changes in the elderly's level of depression will increase their quality of life and positively affect their health. The Elderly could be more productive, healthier, and happier. **Conclusion:** Benson's relaxation therapy could be an alternative to reduce depression in the elderly, especially for those who have religious beliefs. The focus of this relaxation is deep breathing and praising religious sentences.

Keywords: Benson's relaxation therapy, Depression, Elderly

Corresponding Author:

Irma Darmawati, M.Kep.,Ns.,Sp.Kep.Kom
Email: irmadarmawati@upi.edu
Tel: +6285716743606

INTRODUCTION

Aging is the loss of a tissue's ability to heal, replace, and maintain its normal function over time, to the point that it can no longer tolerate infection or repair damage. (1,2). Increasing age in the elderly will cause various changes, both physical, psychological, and socioeconomic changes. For the elderly, this disorder triggers a variety of issues (3). One of the issues that the elderly face is their inability to adapt mentally to changes in their lives. In general, the problems experienced by the elderly that are related to mental health include thought process disorders, dementia, emotional disorders such as depression, low self-esteem, physical disorders, and behavioral disorders. The most common psychological disorder experienced by the elderly is depression (4).

Depression is a feeling of sadness, uselessness, and pessimism that is associated with an affliction shown to oneself or a sense of deep anger, with symptoms such as blank gaze, decreased activity, lack of appetite, the difficulty of sleeping, sadness, loss of enthusiasm, inability to concentrate, and lack of or loss of attention to self, other people, and the environment. A decline in the condition of the elderly will experience changes in psychological aspects related to the personality state of the elderly (5). Depression can be reduced by doing psychotherapy treatment, biological therapy, and religious therapy. One type of religious therapy is the Benson relaxation technique. Benson's relaxation technique involves religious belief factors. Religious belief tends to increase in the elderly, increasing their spiritual activity and getting closer to God. Therefore, the proper relaxation technique to deal with discomfort in the elderly is the Benson relaxation technique (6).

Benson's relaxation therapy is the development of a relaxation response approach based on Benson's faith

factor. Benson relaxation is a method that combines relaxation methods with a belief factor. This therapy has been widely used to reduce tension and achieve calm conditions such as relieving pain, stress, anxiety, insomnia, lowering blood pressure, and depression. This technique attempts to focus attention on a specific concentration by repeating ritual sentences and eliminating distracting thoughts. This relaxation technique can be done for 10 to 20 minutes twice a day (7). The advantages of this relaxation technique are that it is easy to implement by the elderly, cannot reduce medical costs, and can also prevent stress and depression (8). Furthermore, without drugs, relaxation is one of the most effective supplementary approaches for achieving rapid improvement (9).

The problem of depression is closely related to spiritual activities. It is claimed that there is a relationship between spiritual activity and the level of depression in the elderly based on the findings of Mustiadi's research on Benson's relaxation therapy, in which 40 subjects were used in this report. The results showed that the elderly who experienced low spiritual activity experienced a severe level of depression as many as six people, one person had moderate depression level, five people had mild depression level. The elderly who has spiritual activity is experiencing severe depression level of 1 person, moderate depression level 2 people, mild depression level 3 people. Those who have high spiritual activity experience severe depression levels as many as three people, intermediate depression level 2 people, mild depression level 17 people ($p = 0.022$). It can be concluded that spiritual practice and depression levels in the elderly have a significant relationship (11,12).

According to the findings of Mustiadi's philosophical depiction, the dzikir (repeatedly recalling God's names) component is meditation and relaxation, which has much to do with a decrease in mental illness and the emergence of positive effects such as calmness or emotional equilibrium that are beneficial to human existence. Calm or emotional stability is beneficial for human life. Aryana conducted a similar study in the Wening Wardoya Unggaran social rehabilitation unit on the impact of the Benson relaxation technique on reducing stress levels in the elderly. There was a substantial reduction in stress status in the elderly with extreme, moderate, and mild stress, with a p -value of 0.002 (13).

Based on preliminary study, the elderly who live in nursing homes said that they often feel lonely, feel less accepted in the home environment, are unable to carry out their desired roles, and there are demands from the home environment to be able to act as independent people without family assistance. The elderly also said that they felt sad, felt abandoned by their families, and there were frequent quarrels and competition between the elderly living in nursing homes, leading to depression

for the elderly. Although this spiritual approach can be carried out by any religion, especially Benson's relaxation therapy approach, not many researchers have studied its application further, especially in the elderly. Therefore, the need to apply Benson's relaxation approach according to the condition of elderly patients seems to be important to reduce their level of depression and improve their quality of life. Some meditation therapies for elderly with chronic illness patients have included a spiritual component (14). This study aims to see how Benson's relaxation affects the degree of depression in the elderly.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Researchers used a quasi-experimental design with a pretest and posttest control group to see whether Benson's relaxation therapy could benefit older adults with depression. This program was developed based on team discussion and literature review. This program was piloted at one nursing home located in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia.

Inclusion criteria of this study are elderly aged over 60 years (15) and elderly who can communicate well. The exclusion criteria are elderly who are given antidepressant drugs. Therefore, 14 elderly aged over 60 years old participated in this study. This research has been through ethical approval from the center of research and community services Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia letter No. B-0844/UN.40.LP/PJ.00.00. This letter showed ethical approval for the research protocol of Benson's therapy.

Benson's Relaxation Therapy is carried out for three weeks (21 times, 20 minutes every day) with the following steps: 1) Trying the situation and environment, and the client's position is calm and comfortable, 2) Instructing the client to close their eyes slowly, not to force it so that there is no muscle tension around the eyes, Instructing them to relax the muscles as relaxed as possible, starting from the legs, calves, thighs, stomach, and continue to all body muscles, 3) Relaxing your head, neck, and shoulders by turning your head and lifting your shoulders slowly. Hands and arms are stretched out then relax and let it drop at your sides and try to stay relaxed, 4) Starting to breathe slowly and naturally, and saying in their heart a religious phrase or sentence in accordance with their belief, 5) While taking a breath accompanied by saying the word yaa in your heart, after you finish exhale by saying a religious sentence silently, relaxing the whole body accompanied by an attitude of surrender to God. The word or sentence to be spoken can be changed or adjusted to the client's belief. 6) The activity lasts for 20 minutes, during which time the clients are permitted to open their eyes to check the time but are not permitted to use an alarm clock. When it is finished, they are required to stay lying quietly for

a few minutes. First, the eyes are closed, and after that, the eyes are opened.

The Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) instrument is used in this study to assess depression in the elderly. GDS contains 30 closed questions about depression problems in the elderly. Each question's value is worth the question if the answer "yes" is worth one and the answer "no" is 0. The assessment results are then accumulated and categorized into three: mild (5-10), moderate (11-20), and severe. (21-30). Descriptive statistics were used to explain demographic data and main variables. An independent t-test was used to assess differences in outcomes before and after the intervention.

RESULT

This study enrolled a total of 14 older people. The respondent in the intervention and control group were women with an average age of 66.28 (SD = 0.88). Findings in Table. 1 independent t-test showed that in Benson relaxation therapy, a mean score of depression showed a decrease after the intervention, from 13.29 (SD:3.45) to 9.86 (SD:2.24) (p 0.046) CI 95%. In addition, the mean difference between the control and intervention groups has a p-value of 0.046, indicating that there is a substantial difference between older people who are offered Benson relaxation therapy (intervention) and those who are not (control) with the intervention group having a more significant decrease than the control group.

Table I : Effect of Benson's Therapy on anxiety in Elderly

| Group | Min- Max | Mean (SD) | Min- Max | Mean (SD) | P-Value |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|---------|
| | | Pre | | Post | |
| Inter- vention | 8-17 | 13.29 (3.45) | 7-13 | 9.86 (2.24) | 0.046 |
| Control | 6-27 | 16.24 (7.67) | 6-27 | 16.14 (7.10) | |

DISCUSSION

This study was carried out at Panti Budi Pertiwi Bandung, Indonesia, to see how the Benson relaxation technique affected depression in the elderly. Researchers analyzed the decrease in depression in the elderly at Panti Budi Pertiwi because the elderly did Benson relaxation in a row twice a day for three weeks. The elderly experienced a decrease in the level of depression. There was a substantial difference in importance in the intervention population, with the majority (71.4%) experiencing mild depression and only a small proportion (14.3%) experiencing severe depression.

This Benson relaxation therapy is a therapy that can be used as a reference to reduce depression, especially for

those who have religious beliefs because the focus of this relaxation is deep breathing and saying religious words or sentences. These results are consistent with Aryana's research (13), which found that Benson relaxation strategies significantly impact reducing stress levels in the elderly. The stress level of the elderly before being given Benson relaxation technique in the intervention group who experienced mild stress 2 people (13.3%), moderate stress 10 people (66.7%), and severe stress 3 people (20%). The stress level of the elderly after being given the Benson relaxation technique in the intervention group who experienced mild stress 9 people (60%) and moderate stress 6 people (40%). The hypometabolic condition appears to result from an integrated hypothalamic relaxation response", which is compatible with lower sympathetic-nervous-system activity (16).

Benson relaxation, also known as religious relaxation, is a variation of Benson's relaxation response, in which relaxation is combined with religious beliefs (12). Relaxation techniques minimize unpleasant emotions, including fear, anxiety, anger, and despair, by reducing muscle tension(17). The relaxation response that involves the belief that is held will accelerate the occurrence of a relaxed state. in other words, the combination of the relaxation response involving the belief will multiply the benefits obtained from the relaxation response (7)

The findings of this study are also confirmed by studies from Inayati (18) that claims there are discrepancies between the treatment and control groups with p 0.001. Therefore, there is a significance or significant difference. In other words, the availability of Benson stimulation has an impact on the degree of depression in the Jember Elderly Social Service Unit's old age group of 60-70 years. The results of the study were obtained before (pretest). After the Benson relaxation intervention (posttest) in the treatment group, there was a decrease in depression in the elderly, from 13 elderly who experienced severe depression (61.9%) decreased to mild depression by 9 (42.9%), four elderly (19%) still experienced severe depression and from 8 elderly with moderate depression (38.1) to average as many as 8 elderly (38.1%). On the other hand, in the control group, it was found that there was an increase in the level of depression from 7 elderly who experienced major depression (33.3%) to 13 elderly who experienced severe depression (61.9%). This shows the extent of the difference before and after the Benson relaxation intervention in the elderly.

Mustiadi's findings are based on his analysis (11), it is shown that the elderly in the Social Rehabilitation Unit of Wening Wardoyo Ungaran Semarang Regency who experiences low spiritual activity and experiences mild depression levels are 5 older people (41.7%), then older people who have activities moderate spiritual level and experienced a mild level of depression in the category of 3 elderly (50.0%), as well as 17 elderly who had

high spiritual activity and experienced mild depression (77.3%). Therefore, this is caused by the elderly who regularly carry out spiritual activities, and the higher the spiritual activities of the elderly, both individually and in the congregation, the lighter the level of depression that the elderly will experience.

In Benson relaxation therapy, the combination of good relaxation techniques and the strength of confidence is a successful relaxation factor. The element of belief that will be used in the intervention is the element of religious belief. The element of belief entered is the repeated mention of words or sentences following the respective religious beliefs accompanied by an attitude of resignation. Benson relaxation therapy is a therapy that can be a reference to reduce depression, especially for those who have religious beliefs. The virtue of Benson relaxation is that the procedure is easy to do, can be done by yourself at any time, does not require a lot of money, and does not take a long time (7). Benson's relaxation lowers sympathetic nervous system activity and lowers endogenous catecholamine levels. It causes muscle relaxation and a decrease in tension, anxiety, and sadness (17). Individuals may control their breathing, lower their heart rate and blood pressure, and avoid many harmful physiologic responses to stress by concentrating (17).

This therapy has been widely used to reduce tension and achieve calm conditions such as relieving pain, stress, anxiety, insomnia, lowering blood pressure, and depression (19). In pharmacologically treated hypertension individuals, regular use of a technique that induces the relaxation response is linked to lower blood pressure (16). The treatment given to the elderly who experience depression is to provide psychiatric therapy (psychology) called psychotherapy. Psychotherapy is also known as non-pharmacological therapy. One type of non-pharmacological therapy is relaxation techniques and breathing techniques (20). Because it is practiced at no cost other than time, the relaxation response may impact the economics of hypertension treatment (16). In the elderly, they tend to improve their spirituality further and get closer to God, so that the proper relaxation technique to do in dealing with the problem of discomfort in the elderly is the Benson relaxation technique. Benson's relaxation therapy also aided in the improvement of QoL (both in mental and physical dimensions) (21)

CONCLUSION

Benson's relaxation therapy has been shown to help the elderly feel less depressed. Deep breathing and religious praise sentences are used to carry out this technique. If practiced every 20 minutes for three weeks, Benson's relaxation approach incorporates relaxation and conviction strategies to provide depression-relieving

effects. Changes in depression levels in the elderly will increase their quality of life and positively impact their health.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank our colleagues for their contributions and support throughout the research process. In addition, we would like to thank all reviewers who provided constructive feedback on the article and assisted in this manuscript.

REFERENCES

1. Idris DNT, Astarani K. Therapy of Effective Progressive Muscle Relaxation to Reduce Insomnia in Elderly. *Str J Ilm Kesehat*. 2019;8(2):165–71.
2. Rosset E. Aging process of population. Elsevier; 2017.
3. Darmawati I, Dulgani D. Perawatan Diri Lansia Hipertensi Di Kelurahan Cirejag Karawang. *J Keperawatan Komprehensif (Comprehensive Nurs Journal)*. 2019;5(1):1–9.
4. Azizah LM. Keperawatan lanjut usia. Yogyakarta Graha Ilmu. 2011;45.
5. Wang S, Blazer DG. Depression and cognition in the elderly. *Annu Rev Clin Psychol*. 2015;11:331–60.
6. dos Santos-Silva A, Bubols MN, de Lima Argimon I, Stagnaro O, Alminhana LO. Benefits of relaxation techniques in the elderly: a systematic review. *Psico*. 2020;51(1):e28367--e28367.
7. Habibollahpour M, Ranjkesh F, Motalebi SA, Mohammadi F. The Impact of Benson's Relaxation Technique on the Quality of Sleep in the Elderly. *Top Geriatr Rehabil*. 2019;35(1):88–94.
8. Kiani F, Zadeh MAH, Shahrakipour M. The effect of Benson's relaxation method on hemodialysis patients' anxiety. 2017;
9. Ibrahim A, Koyuncu G, Koyuncu N, Suzer NE, Cakir OD, Karcioğlu O. The effect of Benson relaxation method on anxiety in the emergency care. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2019;98(21):e15452.
10. Wati NL, Yosep I, Dharmansyah D, Ibrahim M. The Influences of "Public Speaking-Attractive Training" to the Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA). *KnE Life Sci*. 2021;454–61.
11. Mustiadi. Hubungan aktivitas spiritual dengan tingkat depresi pada lanjut usia di unit rehabilitasi sosial wening wardoyo ungaran Kab. Semarang. 2014;
12. Wulansari W, Margawati A, others. EFFECT OF BRAIN EXERCISE AND BENSON RELAXATION THERAPY ON DEPRESSION LEVEL IN THE ELDERLY IN THE ELDERLY SOCIAL SERVICE UNIT. *Belitung Nurs J*. 2018;4(2):211–8.
13. Aryana KO, Novitasari D. Pengaruh Teknik Relaksasi Benson Terhadap Penurunan Tingkat Stres Lansia di Unit Rehabilitas Sosial Wening

- Wardoyo Ungaran. *J Keperawatan Jiwa*. 2013;1(2).
14. Chan, Roxane Raffin; Larson JL. *Meditation Interventions for Chronic Disease Populations*. 2015;1–15.
 15. WHO. *Global report on Ageism* [Internet]. Global Campaign to Combat Ageism. 2021. 1–202 p. Available from: http://www.who.int/about/licensing/copyright_form/index.html%0Ahttp://www.who.int/about/licensing/
 16. Benson H, Rosner BA, Marzetta BR, Klemchuk HM. Decreased blood-pressure in pharmacologically treated hypertensive patients who regularly elicited the relaxation response. *Medit Class Contemp Perspect*. 2017;123–9.
 17. Jourabchi Z, Satari E, Mafi M, Ranjkesh F. Effects of Benson's relaxation technique on occupational stress in midwives. *Nursing (Lond)*. 2020;50(9):64–8.
 18. Inayati N. Pengaruh Teknik Relaksasi Benson Terhadap Tingkat Depresi Lanjut Usia Awal (Early Old Age) Umur 60-70 tahun di UPT Pelayanan Sosial Lanjut Usia Jember. 2012;
 19. Mahdavi A, Gorji MAH, Gorji AMH, Yazdani J, Ardebil MD. Implementing benson's relaxation training in hemodialysis patients: Changes in perceived stress, anxiety, and depression. *N Am J Med Sci*. 2013;5(9):536.
 20. Reig-Ferrer A, Ferrer-Cascales R, Santos-Ruiz A, Campos-Ferrer A, Prieto-Seva A, Velasco-Ruiz I, et al. A relaxation technique enhances psychological well-being and immune parameters in elderly people from a nursing home: A randomized controlled study. *BMC Complement Altern Med*. 2014;14(1):311.
 21. Mowla F, Khanjari S, Inanlou M. Contribution of Benson's Relaxation Technique and Brief Psycho-Educational Intervention on Quality of Life of Primary Caregivers of Iranian Children with Chronic Diseases. *J Pediatr Nurs* [Internet]. 2017;35:65–71. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2017.02.037>