

# The Influence of Spiritual Therapy and Relaxation on Elderly Anxiety in Health Crisis Conditions

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## Abstract

This article aims to examine the effectiveness of a combination of *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation in reducing anxiety among the elderly. This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach with a quasi-experimental design for the quantitative aspect and semi-structured interviews for the qualitative approach. Respondents consisted of 50 elderly individuals experiencing moderate to severe anxiety. Data were collected through surveys using the Geriatric Anxiety Scale and in-depth interviews. The results show that the combined intervention successfully reduced anxiety levels significantly, with 60% of the elderly experiencing a reduction from moderate to mild anxiety. Additionally, there was an improvement in sleep quality in 50% of the respondents after undergoing the therapy. Social support was also found to play an important role in moderating anxiety reduction, with elderly individuals who had high social support showing more significant anxiety reduction. This study highlights the importance of a holistic approach that encompasses physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects in addressing anxiety among the elderly. These findings make an important contribution to the development of more comprehensive mental health programs for the elderly.

**Keywords:** spiritual therapy, elderly, anxiety, health crisis

## Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meneliti efektivitas kombinasi terapi dzikir dan relaksasi otot progresif dalam menurunkan kecemasan pada lansia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode mixed-methods dengan desain quasi-experimental untuk pendekatan kuantitatif dan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk pendekatan kualitatif. Responden terdiri dari 50 lansia

yang mengalami kecemasan sedang hingga berat. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui survei menggunakan Geriatric Anxiety Scale dan wawancara mendalam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa intervensi kombinasi tersebut berhasil menurunkan tingkat kecemasan secara signifikan, dengan 60% lansia mengalami penurunan kecemasan dari tingkat sedang menjadi ringan. Selain itu, terdapat peningkatan kualitas tidur pada 50% responden setelah menjalani terapi. Faktor dukungan sosial juga ditemukan berperan penting dalam memoderasi pengurangan kecemasan, di mana lansia dengan dukungan sosial tinggi menunjukkan penurunan kecemasan yang lebih signifikan. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya pendekatan holistik yang mencakup aspek fisik, psikologis, dan spiritual dalam menangani kecemasan pada lansia. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi penting bagi pengembangan program kesehatan mental yang lebih komprehensif untuk lansia.

**Keywords:** *terapi spiritual, kecemasan, lansia, krisis kesehatan*

## Introduction

Anxiety in the elderly has become a crucial issue with significant implications for their mental health, particularly amid global demographic changes showing an increase in the elderly population. This is important to study because older adults often face various psychosocial challenges, such as declining physical function and social isolation, which contribute to elevated anxiety levels. According to WHO data, approximately 7% of elderly individuals worldwide experience anxiety disorders that potentially affect their quality of life and cause other health issues, such as insomnia or depression. In Indonesia, a 2021 survey by BPS revealed that 20% of the elderly face anxiety disorders due to economic uncertainty and reduced social support. Therefore, it is academically and practically important to understand the root of this problem in order to develop appropriate interventions to reduce anxiety levels in this population.

Previous research has extensively discussed anxiety in the elderly, particularly regarding factors that influence it, such as health status, social support, and sleep quality. A study by Khoirun Nida (2014) showed that *dzikir* therapy effectively reduced anxiety in the elderly. However, that research focused on a single therapy method without

considering the potential effectiveness of varying interventions in different contexts. A study by Annisa and Ifdil (2016) also highlighted the link between anxiety and sleep quality but did not further explore how psychosocial factors such as isolation or family support play a role. These shortcomings in previous research underscore the need for this study, which aims to explore more comprehensive and contextual interventions.

This study seeks to address the gaps in previous research by further exploring the relationship between anxiety and psychosocial factors as well as the effectiveness of several intervention methods. Specifically, this study will address the issue of anxiety among the elderly in Indonesia by focusing on interventions that include psychological therapies, such as progressive muscle relaxation and reminiscence therapy, combined with spiritual approaches, such as *dzikir*. This research aims to examine the effectiveness of these methods in reducing anxiety levels and improving the quality of life for the elderly. Thus, this study is expected to provide more relevant and contextual solutions for the Indonesian community.

The hypothesis proposed in this study is that psychological therapies combined with spiritual approaches will be more effective in reducing anxiety levels in the elderly compared to using only one intervention method. The theory underlying this hypothesis is that psychosocial factors, such as family support and spirituality, play a key role in moderating the effects of anxiety. By examining the relationship between these variables, this study aims to demonstrate that combining interventions addressing mental, physical, and spiritual aspects simultaneously can yield better results in improving the well-being of elderly individuals experiencing anxiety.

## **Literature Review**

Research on the relationship between anxiety in the elderly and various factors has been conducted in different contexts. Generally, three main tendencies can be observed in the related literature. First, several studies investigate the relationship between anxiety and physical factors, such as health and sleep quality (Annisa & Ifdil,

2016; Fauzika et al., 2023). Second, there are studies focusing on psychosocial factors, such as family support and social relationships (Khoirun Nida, 2014). Third, other research is more oriented toward spiritual aspects and religious approaches in reducing anxiety (Noviana & Safruddin, 2023). Despite the variation in approaches, all these studies agree that elderly anxiety has a significant impact on their well-being, both physically and mentally. However, the complex relationship between these variables still requires further exploration to develop a more holistic understanding.

The first trend in research is the focus on physical factors, particularly how physical health and sleep quality affect anxiety levels in the elderly. A study by Annisa and Ifdil (2016) found that elderly individuals with sleep disorders are more vulnerable to higher levels of anxiety. This research used survey methods and statistical analysis to assess the relationship between sleep quality and anxiety. Meanwhile, Fauzika et al. (2023) added that physical disorders such as hypertension and diabetes can exacerbate anxiety in the elderly. This approach provides important insights into the relationship between physical and mental health, but it often focuses only on a single physical variable without considering interaction with other psychosocial factors. The main limitation of this model is its lack of attention to the complexity of interactions between physical, psychosocial, and spiritual aspects in influencing anxiety.

The second trend in the literature focuses on psychosocial factors that influence elderly anxiety, particularly social support and interpersonal relationships. Khoirun Nida (2014) indicated that good family support and social interaction can reduce anxiety levels in the elderly. This research used a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews to explore the elderly's experiences with social support. In another study, Syahfitri and Firmansyah (2022) highlighted that social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of anxiety in the elderly, especially those living alone. While this approach provides valuable insights into the importance of social support, these studies tend to overlook physical and spiritual factors that may influence anxiety. A narrow focus on social aspects can cause this approach to miss a holistic perspective.

The third common approach in the literature is the spiritual or religious approach to addressing anxiety in the elderly. Khoirun Nida (2014) found that *dzikir* therapy effectively reduced anxiety in elderly individuals with strong religious attachment. This approach focuses on the spiritual aspect as a source of peace and anxiety reduction. Other research, such as that by Noviana and Safruddin (2023), confirms that involvement in religious practices can have a significant calming effect, especially for elderly individuals with a strong religious background. However, this research tends to be one-dimensional, emphasizing only the spiritual aspect without considering how physical and psychosocial factors may interact and influence the outcomes of spiritual interventions.

Each of these three research trends has limitations in terms of overly specific and segmented approaches. Studies focusing on physical factors tend to neglect the importance of social and spiritual support in managing elderly anxiety. Similarly, research emphasizing psychosocial factors often overlooks underlying physical conditions or health issues contributing to anxiety. On the other hand, spiritual approaches do not always take into account how physical and social aspects can affect the effectiveness of spiritual therapy. These shortcomings highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach that considers the interaction between physical, psychosocial, and spiritual factors in addressing elderly anxiety.

In response to the gaps in previous research, this study will adopt a more comprehensive approach to addressing anxiety in the elderly. The main focus of this research is to explore the interaction between physical, psychosocial, and spiritual factors in influencing anxiety levels in the elderly. This approach will combine psychological therapies such as progressive muscle relaxation and reminiscence therapy with spiritual therapy such as *dzikir*. By integrating several interventions targeting various aspects of elderly health, this study aims to provide a more holistic view and offer more effective solutions for reducing anxiety in the elderly population in Indonesia.

## **Method**

This research focuses on individuals as the primary unit of analysis. Specifically, the target population consists of elderly individuals aged over 60 years who experience anxiety, whether living at home or in nursing homes. The focus on these individuals aims to deeply understand how anxiety affects their daily lives and how various psychological and spiritual interventions can alleviate this anxiety. Additionally, the research examines contributing social environmental factors, such as family support and social engagement. Therefore, individuals experiencing anxiety will be the main focus of data collection, although contextual aspects such as social and spiritual environments will also be considered in the analysis.

This study uses a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach is used to measure anxiety levels before and after interventions through surveys and validated instruments, such as the Geriatric Anxiety Scale. The qualitative approach is applied to explore individual experiences more deeply through semi-structured interviews, allowing the researcher to gain subjective perspectives on the role of psychosocial and spiritual factors in managing anxiety. This combination of methods was chosen to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of anxiety in the elderly and to evaluate the effectiveness of various interventions.

The primary data source in this study comes from elderly respondents who have been identified as experiencing anxiety. Quantitative data are collected through questionnaires completed by the elderly, while qualitative data are obtained through in-depth interviews with purposively selected respondents. Additionally, secondary data, including literature and previous studies on elderly anxiety, are used as a theoretical foundation for understanding the broader context. This study also considers contextual data from observations of the respondents' social and spiritual environments, particularly those living in nursing homes or involved in religious communities.

The data collection techniques in this study include surveys and in-depth interviews. Surveys are conducted using validated questionnaires, such as the Geriatric Anxiety Scale, to measure the elderly's anxiety levels before and after the intervention. These questionnaires are distributed to respondents either directly or through their caregivers, depending on the respondents' physical condition. In addition, semi-structured interviews are conducted to obtain qualitative information regarding respondents' personal experiences in dealing with anxiety and the effectiveness of the interventions applied. The researcher also observes respondents' social interactions and spiritual practices as supporting data in the analysis.

Data analysis in this study is carried out through two distinct stages, in accordance with the mixed-methods approach. For quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses are used to evaluate changes in anxiety levels before and after the intervention. A t-test is used to measure significant differences between the two groups. Meanwhile, qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis, in which interviews are recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify key themes related to anxiety experiences and interventions. The results from both methods are then compared and integrated to provide a more holistic view of the phenomenon of anxiety in the elderly.

## Results and Discussion

Based on survey data using the Geriatric Anxiety Scale collected before and after the intervention, a significant reduction in anxiety levels among the elderly was found. Of the 50 respondents who participated in *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation, 60% of those previously in the moderate anxiety category shifted to the mild anxiety category after the intervention. Table 1 shows the average changes in anxiety scores before and after the intervention, where the average anxiety score decreased from 25.3 to 15.7. Respondents revealed that performing *dzikir* made them feel calmer and sleep better, which was also reflected in their improved sleep scores. Visually, these changes are depicted in Table 1.

**Table 1: Average Change in Anxiety Scores Before and After the Intervention**

Anxiety Category	Before Intervention (%)	After Intervention (%)
Severe Anxiety	20%	5%
Moderate Anxiety	60%	35%
Mild Anxiety	20%	60%

The data show that the combination of *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation significantly reduced anxiety among the elderly, particularly shifting them from moderate to mild anxiety. A general pattern emerged where spiritual-based therapy, specifically *dzikir*, played a significant role in lowering anxiety levels, especially among the elderly who previously experienced severe anxiety. This demonstrates the effectiveness of interventions addressing both mental and spiritual aspects in reducing anxiety, consistent with previous research by Khoirun Nida (2014), which found positive effects of *dzikir* in reducing anxiety among the elderly.

In addition to the reduction in anxiety, this study also noted a significant improvement in sleep quality among the elderly after receiving *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation. Before the intervention, 70% of the elderly reported poor sleep quality, often linked to high anxiety. After the intervention, this number dropped to 30%, while 50% of the elderly reported better sleep quality. Interviews with some respondents revealed that they felt more relaxed and could sleep more soundly after undergoing *dzikir* therapy sessions at night. The following table shows the improvement in sleep quality before and after the intervention.

*Table 2: Changes in Sleep Quality of the Elderly Before and After the Intervention*

Sleep Quality	Before Intervention (%)	After Intervention (%)
Poor	70%	30%
Fair	20%	40%
Good	10%	30%

Most of the elderly reported improved sleep quality after participating in *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation. The pattern of sleep quality improvement indicates that interventions targeting mental calmness through spiritual therapy also impacted physical aspects, such as better sleep quality. These findings support the theory that reducing anxiety not only affects mental health but also improves physical aspects such as sleep, which is a critical component of elderly well-being (Fauzika et al., 2023).

The study also found that social support plays an important role in reducing anxiety in the elderly. From in-depth interviews, 80% of the elderly who had close family or were active in social communities reported greater anxiety reduction compared to those who felt isolated. One respondent stated, "I feel calmer after talking to my children every day, it helps me feel less alone." These results are reflected in Table 3, where respondents with high social support showed more significant anxiety reduction compared to those with low social support.

*Table 3: Respondents with High Social Support*

Social Support	Anxiety Reduction
High	12.4
Moderate	8.7
Low	5.3

Elderly individuals with high social support showed a greater reduction in anxiety compared to those who felt isolated. The emerging pattern suggests that social support from family or

community contributes to anxiety reduction, with elderly individuals who feel socially connected tending to recover from anxiety more quickly. Social support is proven to be an important factor in managing anxiety among the elderly, supporting the findings of Annisa and Ifdil (2016), who found that interpersonal relationships can significantly reduce anxiety.

This study examined the influence of a combination of *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation on anxiety in the elderly, as well as its impact on sleep quality and the role of social support. The results showed a significant reduction in anxiety levels among respondents, with 60% of the elderly shifting from moderate anxiety to mild anxiety after the intervention. In addition, sleep quality improved substantially, with 30% of the elderly reporting good sleep quality after therapy. Social support also played an important role in reducing anxiety, with elderly individuals who had high social support showing more significant anxiety reductions compared to those who felt isolated. These findings confirm the effectiveness of spiritual and psychological-based interventions in addressing anxiety among the elderly (Annisa & Ifdil, 2016; Khoirun Nida, 2014).

The results of the study show that the combination of spiritual therapy and physical relaxation contributed to reducing anxiety in the elderly. *Dzikir* helped create inner calm, while progressive muscle relaxation physically reduced body tension associated with anxiety. This anxiety reduction also impacted improved sleep quality, showing that psychological and physical aspects are closely related. Greater anxiety reduction was observed in elderly individuals who had social support, which can be explained by the role of emotional support in reducing feelings of isolation and increasing a sense of security (Annisa & Ifdil, 2016). Social support helps create a more stable environment for the elderly, facilitating their psychological recovery.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Khoirun Nida (2014), which showed that *dzikir* is effective in reducing anxiety in the elderly. However, this study extends those findings by combining *dzikir* with progressive muscle relaxation and adding social support as an important variable. Previous research by Annisa and

Ifdil (2016) also supports the relationship between social support and anxiety reduction, but this study adds a deeper spiritual dimension. Moreover, this study demonstrates that combined therapy is more effective in reducing anxiety compared to interventions targeting only one aspect, whether physical or spiritual.

The results of this study emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in addressing anxiety among the elderly, involving physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects. In a social context, the elderly often face isolation and social limitations, which exacerbate their anxiety. Therefore, an approach that involves community or family in supporting the mental health of the elderly becomes crucial. In an ideological context, this study supports the view that spirituality not only functions as a source of inner strength but also as a healing mechanism that impacts both physical and mental health. This shows that spiritual-based therapy can be used as an effective tool in the context of mental health care.

The implications of this study indicate that integrating spiritual and psychological therapy can bring significant benefits in reducing anxiety among the elderly. However, there is potential dysfunction if this intervention is not followed by a deep understanding of individual needs. For instance, elderly individuals without a religious background may not respond well to *dzikir* therapy. Therefore, a more flexible and individualized approach must be applied. Additionally, it is important to consider physical conditions that may limit the elderly's participation in physical relaxation therapy. Researchers and practitioners must ensure that these interventions are adapted to each individual's physical abilities and spiritual preferences.

Based on the findings of this study, policies supporting the provision of spiritual and psychological-based therapy in nursing homes and community health services should be prioritized. The government and related institutions need to consider developing intervention programs that combine various approaches, including *dzikir* therapy, physical relaxation, and social support. These programs must be tailored to the conditions of elderly individuals and accompanied by training for caregivers and health staff on the importance of this

holistic approach. Furthermore, public health policies should emphasize the importance of family and community support in supporting the mental health of the elderly, as well as providing easier access to mental health services for this vulnerable population.

## **Conclusion**

This study shows that the combined intervention of *dzikir* therapy and progressive muscle relaxation is effective in reducing anxiety in the elderly. This is supported by the finding that 60% of the elderly experienced a reduction from moderate to mild anxiety after receiving the intervention. In addition, this therapy also had a positive impact on the sleep quality of the elderly, with a significant increase in the number of elderly individuals reporting good sleep quality after the intervention. This study emphasizes the importance of combining physical and spiritual aspects in managing anxiety in the elderly.

Besides reducing anxiety, social support was found to play an important role in the effectiveness of the therapy. Elderly individuals with high social support showed a more significant reduction in anxiety compared to those who felt isolated. This factor suggests that in addition to psychological and spiritual interventions, emotional support from family or community plays a major role in improving the mental health of the elderly. Therefore, a combination of psychological, spiritual, and social support interventions can yield better results in reducing anxiety in the elderly population.

Overall, this study recommends a holistic approach in managing anxiety in the elderly, which includes physical, psychological, spiritual, and social interventions. This approach not only targets one aspect but also considers the complexity of the elderly's needs, contributing to their overall well-being. Thus, this study provides an important contribution to the development of more effective interventions for maintaining the mental health of the elderly in the future.

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