



The Effect of Classical Music Therapy on Depression Levels in the Elderly

Livana PH^{1*}, Ayu Rahayu¹, Intan Mariyana², Nabila Abida Mashyar³, Kandar², Titik Suerni,

¹Nursing Professional Study Program, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kesehatan Kendal, Jl Laut No 31 Kendal Jawa Tengah 51311

²RSJD Dr Amino Gondohutomo, Jl. Brigjen Sudiarto No.347, Gemah, Kec. Pedurungan, Kota Semarang, Jawa Tengah 50191. Indonesia

*livana.ph@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Depression in the elderly is a mood disorder characterized by prolonged feelings of sadness, loss of interest in daily activities, feelings of worthlessness, and sleep and appetite disturbances. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of classical music therapy on the level of depression in the elderly at Amino Gondho Hutomo Mental Hospital in Semarang. A quasi-experimental research design was used with a one-group pretest-posttest design. The sample in this study consisted of 9 respondents. Sampling used total sampling. The results showed that the provision of classical gamelan music therapy intervention to all respondents experienced a decrease in depression scores. This was indicated by negative ranks for 9 respondents, which means the post-test score was lower than the pre-test score. Based on the results of the Wilcoxon test, a Z value of -3.000 was obtained with a significance value of $p = 0.003$ ($p < 0.05$). Thus, H_0 was rejected, which means there was a significant difference between the depression scores of the elderly before and after being given music therapy.

Keywords: classical music; depression; elderly

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INTRODUCTION

The elderly—defined as those over the age of 60—often face various challenges, including a high risk of depression. This condition can stem from difficulties in adapting to changes resulting from physical, mental, and social decline. Retirement can also trigger depression, as older adults frequently experience loneliness, a loss of income, and the cessation of their usual activities (Sulistyowati et al., 2024). Depression is an emotional condition accompanied by psychological aspects. Its symptoms are often linked to difficulties in adjusting to the loss of something significant in life and to various stressors. Older adults often feel lonely or neglected—particularly if they lack family support—thereby increasing their risk of depression. Without adequate support, they may exhibit common depressive symptoms such as a melancholic disposition, feelings of worthlessness, a sense of helplessness, and, in the most severe cases, suicidal urges (Sulistyowati et al., 2024).

The World Health Organization estimates that by 2023, the number of elderly people in Southeast Asia will reach 142 million, or 8% of the population. The percentage of elderly people in Indonesia rose by approximately 4% between 2010 and 2022, reaching 11.75% (Turap et al., 2023). In South Sumatra Province, approximately 90.08 percent of the population is under the age of 60, while 9.92 percent are aged 60 or older. Meanwhile, data from the Banyuasin Regency Health Office indicates that the elderly population in the area stood at 20,876 in 2023. The number of elderly people worldwide continues to rise, and it is projected that by 2050, the elderly population in Indonesia will exceed the current global elderly population. Compared to individuals without depression, depression increases the risk of mortality among the elderly by up to forty percent. Furthermore, research indicates that depression is more prevalent in the 60-to-74 age group than in other age groups (Syuib et al., 2020).

Findings from the Basic Health Research (Riskesdas, 2018) indicate that 19.2% of the elderly in Indonesia suffer from mental-emotional disorders. This condition poses a risk of significantly reducing the elderly's quality of life and increasing the burden on families and healthcare systems. Pharmacotherapy and other medical interventions have long been used to treat depression; however, the adverse side effects of antidepressant medications taken by the elderly—such as cognitive dysfunction, orthostatic hypotension, and drug interactions—necessitate the development of non-pharmacological approaches.

One non-pharmacological intervention considered effective is classical music therapy. Classical music has the ability to improve mood, trigger calming physiological responses, and enhance memory and positive emotions by activating the brain's limbic system. Classical music therapy is safe, highly flexible, and can be administered either individually or in groups. Furthermore, music makes a significant cultural and spiritual contribution to the lives of the elderly. Recent studies indicate that classical music can alleviate depression among the elderly.

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, specifically a one-group pretest-posttest design. The study population consisted of all elderly individuals at RSJD Amino Gondho Hutomo Semarang, totaling nine respondents. A total sampling technique was used, resulting in a sample size of nine respondents. The study was conducted at RSJD Amino Gondho Hutomo Semarang, adhering to specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study utilized the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS), an instrument appropriate for the condition of elderly respondents. Each response indicating symptoms of depression was assigned a score of 1, while responses not indicating depression were assigned a score of 0. The total score was calculated by summing the scores of all items, with the following interpretation: scores of 0–4 indicate no depression; 5–8, mild depression; 9–11, moderate depression; and 12–15, severe depression. The GDS instrument was used to measure respondents' depression levels before (pretest) and after (posttest) the gamelan music therapy intervention in order to assess changes in depression levels among the elderly.

RESULT

Table 1.
Frequency distribution of depression among the elderly (pre-test)

Depression	f	f	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Moderate depression	6	66.7	66.7	66.7
Severe depression	3	33.3	33.3	100.0

Table 1 menunjukkan distribusi frekuensi tingkat depresi sedang pada lansia (pre test) sebanyak 6 (66,7%), Tingkat depresi berat pada lansia (pre test) sebanyak 3 (33,3%).

Table 2.
Frequency distribution of depression among the elderly (post-test)

Depression	f	f	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mild depression	6	66.7	66.7	66.7
Moderate depression	3	33.3	33.3	100.0

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of mild depression levels among the elderly (post-test) at 6 (66.7%) and moderate depression levels among the elderly (post-test) at 3 (33.3%).

Table 3.
The effect of classical gamelan music therapy on the level of depression in the elderly

Depression	Pre test		Post test		P value
	f	%	f	%	
Severe Depression-Moderate Depression	9	100	3	33,3	0,003
Mild Depression	0	0	6	66,7	

Table 3 shows that all respondents who received the classical gamelan music therapy intervention experienced a decrease in depression scores. This is indicated by nine respondents falling into the "negative ranks" category, meaning their post-test scores were lower than their pre-test scores. The Wilcoxon test results yielded a Z-value of -3.000 with a significance value of $p = 0.003$ ($p < 0.05$).

Consequently, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, indicating a significant difference in the elderly subjects' depression scores before and after the music therapy intervention.

DISCUSSION

The study results indicate that prior to the gamelan classical music therapy intervention, the majority of the elderly subjects fell into the categories of moderate depression (66.7%) and severe depression (33.3%). This condition reflects a high level of depression among the elderly patients undergoing care at the Dr. Amino Gondho Hutomo Regional Mental Hospital. These findings align with the theory that the elderly are a group vulnerable to depressive disorders due to physical, psychological, and social changes—such as role loss, social isolation, and concurrent chronic illnesses.

Following the administration of gamelan classical music therapy over a three-day period—with 30-minute sessions—a significant change in depression levels was observed. Post-test results showed that the majority of the elderly fell into the mild depression category (66.7%), while the remainder were in the moderate depression category (33.3%); notably, no subjects remained in the severe depression category. These changes indicate that gamelan classical music therapy has a positive impact on the psychological well-being of the elderly.

Theoretically, classical music—including Javanese gamelan—features slow tempos and steady rhythms that can induce relaxation. Music stimulates the brain's limbic system, which plays a key role in regulating emotions, mood, and stress responses. Activation of the limbic system can boost the release of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and endorphins, thereby enhancing feelings of well-being and alleviating symptoms of depression. Furthermore, music helps reduce sympathetic nervous system activity, allowing the body to enter a more relaxed state. This aligns with research by Apriliya and Khasanah (2023), which demonstrated that slow-tempo music, such as Javanese gamelan, is effective in reducing psychological tension and improving emotional comfort among the elderly.

Additionally, a study by Hidayat and Amir (2021) found that music therapy—as a non-pharmacological intervention—can reduce depressive symptoms without causing side effects, making it highly suitable for elderly individuals who are vulnerable to the adverse effects of pharmacotherapy. These findings reinforce the conclusion that gamelan classical music therapy serves as a safe, easily implemented, and effective nursing intervention for lowering depression levels in the elderly. Thus, the results of this study support the use of gamelan classical music therapy as part of psychiatric and gerontological nursing interventions aimed at improving the mental health and quality of life of the elderly, particularly within psychiatric hospital settings.

CONCLUSION

Prior to the intervention of classical *gamelan* music therapy, the majority of the elderly subjects fell into the categories of moderate depression (66.7%) and severe depression (33.3%), indicating a relatively high level of depression among the elderly at the study site. Following the three-day intervention—consisting of 30-minute sessions—a shift in depression levels was observed: the majority of respondents fell into the mild depression category (66.7%) and the remainder into the moderate category (33.3%), with no subjects exhibiting severe depression. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test yielded a Z-value of -3.000 and a p-value of 0.003 ($p < 0.05$), signifying a significant difference in depression levels before and after the therapy. Thus, it can be concluded that classical gamelan music therapy significantly reduces depression levels in the elderly, making it a viable non-pharmacological nursing intervention within psychiatric and gerontological nursing care.

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