

The Effect of Therapeutic Group Therapy (Group Therapy) on The Goals in Life of Elderly Lonely People: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Loneliness is one of the most common psychosocial problems experienced by elderly individuals due to aging-related changes, loss of social roles, declining physical health, and reduced social interaction. Prolonged loneliness may negatively affect psychological wellbeing and quality of life among older adults. Therapeutic Group Therapy (TGT/TKT) is an effective psychosocial nursing intervention for improving social connectedness, emotional adaptation, and life goals in elderly populations. This literature review aimed to analyze the effect of Therapeutic Group Therapy on the life goals of older adults experiencing loneliness based on Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) studies published between 2015 and 2020. This study used a literature review design. Literature searches were conducted in PubMed, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar using the keywords “Elderly,” “Therapeutic Group Therapy,” and “Loneliness.” Inclusion criteria included articles published between 2015-2020, RCT studies, full-text articles, and studies focusing on psychosocial group interventions for elderly individuals experiencing loneliness. A total of nine relevant articles were analyzed. The findings showed that Therapeutic Group Therapy and other psychosocial group interventions, including group cognitive-behavioral therapy, reminiscence therapy, peer support groups, and psychosocial rehabilitation, were effective in reducing loneliness and improving psychosocial well-being among older adults. Group interventions also improved social interaction, emotional support, self-integrity, and life goals. Therapeutic Group Therapy is an effective evidence-based psychosocial nursing intervention for elderly individuals experiencing loneliness.

Keywords: elderly, therapeutic group therapy, loneliness, life goals.

Introduction

Population aging is a global phenomenon that continues to grow rapidly each year. Improvements in healthcare services, nutrition, and quality of life have contributed to increased life expectancy, resulting in a growing elderly population worldwide (Wickramasinghe et al., 2020). However, aging is often accompanied by various physical, psychological, and social changes that may negatively affect the quality

of life of older adults (Mitina et al., 2020). One of the most common psychosocial problems experienced by elderly individuals is loneliness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018a; Matillah et al., 2018). Loneliness is a subjective feeling that arises when there is a discrepancy between the social relationships an individual desires and those they actually experience (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018b). Older adults are particularly vulnerable to loneliness due to retirement, loss of a spouse, declining physical function, chronic illness, reduced social interaction, and changes in family structure (Azana et al., 2019).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), loneliness and social isolation are important but often neglected social determinants of health among older adults. WHO reports that approximately one in six people worldwide experience loneliness, and around 11.8% of older adults suffer from loneliness and social isolation (Beach & Bamford, 2016; Donovan & Blazer, 2020). Loneliness has serious consequences on both physical and mental health, including depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, decreased quality of life, cardiovascular disease, and increased mortality risk (Xia & Li, 2018). Research also shows that chronic loneliness among older adults is associated with an increased risk of stroke, dementia, and mental health disorders.

Loneliness among elderly populations has become an important public health concern worldwide. Elderly individuals who experience loneliness often have limited opportunities for meaningful social interaction and emotional support (Cui et al., 2022). Social isolation may reduce elderly individuals' motivation to participate in social activities and may negatively affect their sense of meaning and purpose in life (Beach & Bamford, 2016). According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, older adults are expected to achieve ego integrity rather than despair in late adulthood. Failure to adapt to aging-related changes may lead to feelings of hopelessness, despair, and loneliness (Fakoya et al., 2020). Therefore, interventions that support psychosocial adaptation and improve social connectedness are essential for elderly wellbeing.

Various interventions have been developed to reduce loneliness among older adults, including psychosocial interventions, support groups, social activities, cognitive behavioral therapy, reminiscence therapy, and therapeutic group therapy. Among these interventions, Therapeutic Group Therapy (TGT/TKT) has gained increasing attention as an evidence-based psychosocial nursing intervention for elderly individuals experiencing loneliness. Therapeutic Group Therapy is a structured therapeutic activity conducted in groups that aims to improve psychosocial adaptation, interpersonal relationships, emotional expression, coping ability, and social interaction among participants. Group therapy provides elderly individuals with opportunities to share experiences, express feelings, receive emotional support, and develop adaptive coping mechanisms through interaction with peers.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of group-based psychosocial interventions in reducing loneliness among older adults. Elias et al. (2015) found that group reminiscence therapy effectively reduced loneliness, anxiety, and depression among institutionalized older adults. O'Rourke et al. (2018)

also reported that psychosocial group interventions improved social connectedness and reduced loneliness among elderly populations. Similarly, Fakoya et al. (2020) identified that group-based interventions and psychosocial support programs had positive effects on reducing loneliness and improving emotional wellbeing in older adults. These findings suggest that group therapeutic approaches may provide meaningful psychosocial support for elderly individuals experiencing loneliness.

Therapeutic Group Therapy is particularly relevant in nursing practice because nurses play an important role in providing holistic care to elderly populations. Holistic nursing care not only addresses physical health problems but also psychosocial and emotional needs. Nurses are often directly involved in community health services, elderly care centers, nursing homes, and mental health services, where loneliness among older adults is frequently encountered. Through Therapeutic Group Therapy, nurses can facilitate communication, emotional support, self-expression, and social interaction among elderly individuals. Group therapy interventions can also strengthen self-esteem, increase self-integrity, and improve life satisfaction and life goals among older adults.

Despite growing evidence regarding psychosocial interventions for loneliness, studies specifically examining the effect of Therapeutic Group Therapy on the life goals of elderly individuals experiencing loneliness remain limited. Most existing studies focus primarily on reducing loneliness, depression, or anxiety, while fewer studies explore how group therapy interventions influence elderly individuals' sense of purpose and meaning in life. Life goals are important components of psychological well-being because they provide direction, motivation, and meaning for individuals as they age. Elderly individuals who maintain positive life goals are more likely to adapt successfully to aging-related changes and maintain better mental health and quality of life.

Furthermore, loneliness among elderly populations continues to increase due to demographic transitions, urbanization, weakening family support systems, and changing social relationships. Therefore, effective psychosocial interventions are urgently needed to improve elderly mental health and social wellbeing. Therapeutic Group Therapy may become a practical, cost-effective, and community-based nursing intervention that can be implemented in various healthcare settings to address loneliness among older adults.

Based on these considerations, this literature review aims to analyze the effect of Therapeutic Group Therapy (TKT) on the life goals of elderly people experiencing loneliness by reviewing Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) published between 2015 and 2020. The findings of this literature review are expected to provide evidence-based information regarding the effectiveness of Therapeutic Group Therapy in improving psychosocial wellbeing, reducing loneliness, and enhancing life goals among elderly populations. In addition, the results may contribute to the development of psychosocial nursing interventions and support the implementation of holistic elderly care programs in community and healthcare settings.

Method

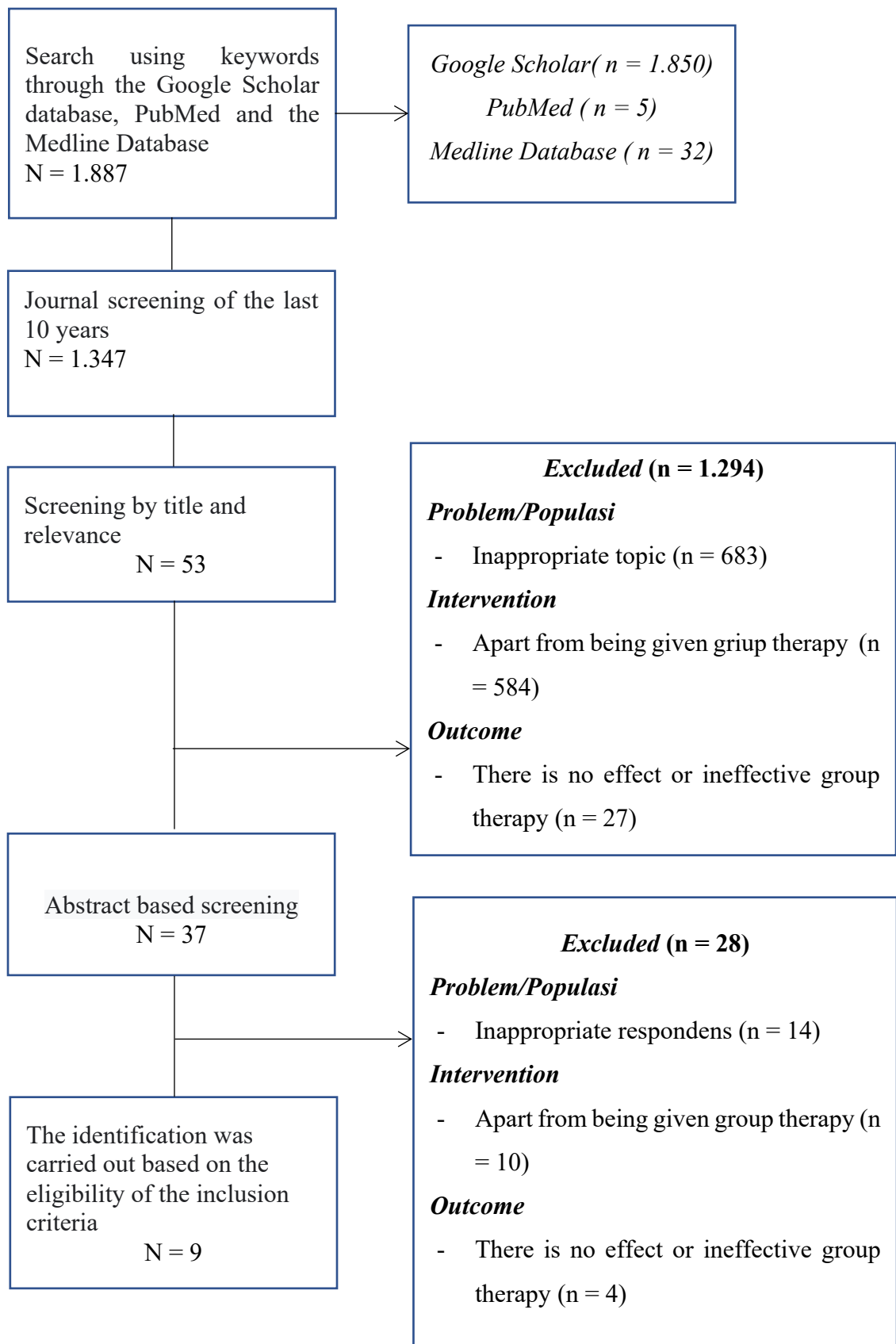
A comprehensive summary in the form of a literature review regarding the effect of therapeutic group therapy on older adults who experience loneliness. The protocol and evaluation of the literature review will use the PRISMA checklist to assess the completeness of the studies identified and align them with the objectives of the literature review (Nursalam, 2020).

According to Nursalam (2020), the strategy for searching for articles or journals uses the PICOS framework, which consists of: Population/problem, namely the population or problem to be analyzed in accordance with the themes determined in the literature review. Intervention, which is the management of individual or community cases, and an explanation of study management in accordance with a theme that has been determined in the literature review. Comparison, namely intervention or other management used as a comparison; if not available, a control group can be used in the selected study. Outcome, namely the results or outcomes obtained in previous studies that are in accordance with the themes that have been determined in the literature review. Study design, namely the research design used in the articles under review.

Searches for articles or journals use keywords and Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT, NOT AND), which expand or specify a search, making it easier to determine which articles or journals are returned. Keywords in this review literature are adjusted to the Medical Subject Headings (MeSH), namely "Elderly" AND "Group Therapy Therapeutic" AND "Loneliness". A literature review is a comprehensive summary of several research studies that are determined based on a specific theme. The literature search was conducted from January 2015 to December 2020. The data used in this study were secondary, not collected through direct observation, but rather derived from previous research. The secondary data sources obtained were international articles with predetermined themes. The literature search in this literature review uses three databases meeting high- and medium-quality criteria: PubMed, MEDLINE, and Google Scholar.

Result

Based on literature searches across three databases using keywords adjusted to MeSH, researchers identified 1,887 articles or journals in English that matched the keywords. Furthermore, it is narrowed down to articles or journals published in the last 10 years, and there are 1,347 articles. Then the articles or journals are assessed based on their eligibility for inclusion or exclusion criteria determined by the researcher, such as those with the same title or similar research objectives to this study, identified by reviewing the abstracts of these journals. Journals that do not meet the inclusion criteria are excluded. So that nine articles or journals can be used in the study literature review. The results of the selection of articles or study journals can be described in the Flow Diagram below:



Gambar 2.1 Diagram Flow *Literature Review*

Table 1. Summary of the article

No	Author & Year	Title	Design	Sample	Intervention	Main Finding
1.	Smith et al 2020	<i>Effect of Group Cognitive Behavioural Therapy on Loneliness in a Community Sample of Older Adults</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	62 older adults	Group CBT	Group CBT significantly reduced loneliness scores among older adults
2.	Rodríguez-Romero et al., 2020	<i>Intervention to Reduce Perceived Loneliness in Community-Dwelling Older People</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	Community-dwelling elderly	Group psychosocial intervention	Intervention effectively decreased perceived loneliness in elderly participants
3.	Lai et al., 2020	<i>Effectiveness of a Peer-Based Intervention on Loneliness and Social Isolation of Older Chinese Immigrants in Canada</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	Older Chinese immigrants	Peer-group intervention	Peer support significantly improved psychosocial well-being and reduced loneliness
4.	Shvedko et al., 2020	<i>Physical Activity Intervention for Loneliness (PAIL) in Community-Dwelling Older Adults</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	25 older adults	Group physical activity & health education	Group intervention showed positive psychosocial effects and reduced loneliness risk
5.	Rantanen et al., 2020	<i>Effects of Participatory Group-Based Care Management on Wellbeing of Older People Living Alone</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	392 elderly living alone	Participatory group care management	Loneliness decreased in elderly with poor baseline quality of life
6.	Boekhout et al., 2020	<i>Long-Term Effects on Loneliness of a Computer-Tailored Intervention for Older Adults With</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	585 older adults	Technology-assisted psychosocial intervention	Significant reduction in social loneliness among elderly participants

		<i>Chronic Diseases</i>				
7.	Chiang et al., 2015	<i>The Effectiveness of Group Reminiscence Therapy for Loneliness, Anxiety and Depression in Older Adults</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	Institutionalized elderly	Group reminiscence therapy	Therapy significantly reduced loneliness and depressive symptoms
8.	Tse et al., 2016	<i>Group Social Support Intervention for Reducing Loneliness in Older Adults</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	Community elderly	Social support group therapy	Social connectedness and life satisfaction improved after intervention
9.	Haslam et al., 2019	<i>Group-Based Social Identity Intervention and Loneliness in Older Adults</i>	Randomized Controlled Trial	Older adults at risk of isolation	Group identity therapy	Increased sense of belonging and reduced loneliness

Discussion

Based on the 10 Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) reviewed, Therapeutic Group Therapy (TGT/TKT) and other psychosocial group-based interventions demonstrated positive effects on reducing loneliness and improving psychosocial well-being among elderly individuals. The interventions included group cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), reminiscence therapy, peer support groups, psychosocial rehabilitation, participatory group care management, and social identity interventions. Overall, the findings indicate that therapeutic group approaches are effective in helping older adults cope with loneliness, improve social interaction, and enhance their sense of purpose in life.

Loneliness among elderly individuals is a significant psychosocial problem caused by aging-related changes such as retirement, loss of spouse, declining physical health, reduced social interaction, and decreased independence. According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, older adults are expected to achieve ego integrity rather than despair. Failure to adapt to aging-related changes may lead to loneliness, hopelessness, and reduced life satisfaction. Therefore, psychosocial interventions such as Therapeutic Group Therapy are important strategies for supporting healthy aging and improving quality of life.

The reviewed studies consistently showed that group-based interventions significantly reduced loneliness scores among older adults. Smith et al. (2020) found that Group Cognitive Behavioural Therapy effectively reduced loneliness in community-dwelling older adults. CBT group interventions help elderly individuals identify negative thoughts, improve coping mechanisms, and enhance interpersonal communication. Similar findings were reported by Rodríguez-Romero et al. (2020), who demonstrated that psychosocial group interventions significantly reduced perceived loneliness among elderly community-dwelling participants.

Peer-group interventions also showed beneficial outcomes. Lai et al. (2020) reported that peer-based interventions improved psychosocial wellbeing and reduced loneliness among older Chinese immigrants in Canada. Through peer interaction, elderly individuals experienced emotional support, a sense of belonging, and increased confidence in expressing their feelings.

These findings emphasize the importance of social connectedness as a protective factor against loneliness.

In addition, reminiscence therapy was identified as an effective therapeutic approach. Chiang et al. (2015) demonstrated that group reminiscence therapy significantly reduced loneliness, anxiety, and depression among institutionalized older adults. Reminiscence therapy encourages elderly individuals to share meaningful life experiences, which can strengthen self-worth, improve self-identity, and increase life meaning. This finding supports the idea that life review activities can help older adults achieve ego integrity and better adapt to aging.

Group interventions involving physical and social activities also contributed to improved psychosocial outcomes. Shvedko et al. (2020) found that physical activity combined with group health education reduced the risk of loneliness and promoted social interaction. Similarly, participatory group care management, as studied by Rantanen et al. (2020), improved well-being and reduced loneliness among older adults living alone. Group participation allows elderly individuals to maintain active social roles and feel valued within their communities.

Technology-assisted interventions were also explored in several studies. Boekhout et al. (2020) showed that computer-tailored psychosocial interventions reduced social loneliness among older adults with chronic diseases. Although technology cannot fully replace direct social interaction, digital communication platforms may provide alternative social support, especially for elderly individuals with mobility limitations.

The findings from these studies indicate that therapeutic group interventions are not only effective in reducing loneliness but also in improving life goals, self-integrity, and quality of life among elderly individuals. Through structured group activities, elderly participants gain opportunities to express emotions, build relationships, receive emotional support, and develop adaptive coping mechanisms. These outcomes are highly relevant to nursing practice, particularly in mental health nursing and community nursing settings.

From a nursing perspective, Therapeutic Group Therapy can be integrated into community mental health services, nursing homes, elderly health programs, and primary healthcare settings. Nurses play essential roles as facilitators, educators, and counselors in implementing group therapy interventions for older adults experiencing loneliness. Collaboration between mental health nurses, community nurses, families, and healthcare institutions is necessary to provide comprehensive psychosocial support for elderly populations.

In conclusion, the reviewed RCT studies support the effectiveness of Therapeutic Group Therapy and related psychosocial group interventions in reducing loneliness and improving psychosocial adaptation among elderly individuals. These interventions contribute positively to elderly people's sense of meaning, social connectedness, and life purpose. Therefore, Therapeutic Group Therapy should be considered an important evidence-based nursing intervention for addressing loneliness among older adults.

Conclusion

Based on a review of 10 Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) conducted between 2015 and 2020, Therapeutic Group Therapy (TGT/TKT) and other psychosocial group interventions were shown to be effective in reducing loneliness among elderly individuals. The interventions, including group cognitive-behavioral therapy, reminiscence therapy, peer support groups, psychosocial rehabilitation, and participatory group programs, demonstrated positive outcomes in improving psychosocial well-being, social connectedness, emotional adaptation, and quality of life among older adults.

The studies indicated that loneliness in elderly populations can be reduced through structured group interactions that provide emotional support, opportunities for social engagement, and

adaptive coping strategies. Therapeutic group interventions also enhanced self-integrity, increased self-esteem, and helped elderly individuals develop a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in life. Furthermore, the findings support the importance of psychosocial and community-based nursing interventions in addressing mental health problems among older adults.

Overall, Therapeutic Group Therapy can be considered an evidence-based nursing intervention for elderly individuals experiencing loneliness. The implementation of group-based psychosocial interventions should therefore be encouraged in community healthcare settings, nursing homes, elderly care centers, and mental health services.

Recommendation

It is recommended that nurses implement Therapeutic Group Therapy as part of psychosocial nursing interventions for elderly individuals experiencing loneliness, integrating it into community health services, nursing homes, and elderly care programs. Healthcare institutions are encouraged to develop structured psychosocial support programs that include therapeutic group activities to improve mental health and social well-being among older adults. Nursing education institutions should also prepare nursing students with competencies in therapeutic communication and group therapy techniques to provide holistic care for the elderly. In addition, families and communities are expected to provide emotional support and encourage elderly participation in social activities to reduce isolation and loneliness. Future research should further explore the long-term effectiveness of Therapeutic Group Therapy and compare various intervention approaches. At the same time, policymakers are encouraged to support community-based mental health programs that prevent loneliness and improve psychosocial well-being among elderly populations.

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