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Guided imagery and music therapy for anxiety in third-trimester pregnancy

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Abstract

Background: Pregnancy is a sensitive period that brings physical and psychological changes, including anxiety. Anxiety is a normal reaction when it functions as an adaptive mechanism that helps individuals prepare for facing threats. To overcome anxiety, a combination of guided imagery and music therapy can be used as one of the non-pharmacological measures to reduce anxiety in pregnant women in the third trimester.

Purpose: To determine the effect of a combination of guided imagery and music therapy on the anxiety level of third-trimester pregnant women in the working area.

Method: A quantitative approach with a Quasi-Experiment design, utilising a One-Group Pretest-Posttest layout without a control group. The sampling technique used was non-probability, specifically accidental sampling. Based on Roscoe's theory, the sample size was set at 10-20 individuals.

Results: The results of the paired samples T-test showed a p-value of 0.001, which is less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Conclusion: There is an effect of the combination of guided imagery and music therapy on the anxiety levels of pregnant women in their third trimester in the work area.

Keywords: Anxiety; Guided Imagery; Music Therapy; Pregnant Women.

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is one of the most critical life events and a sensitive period in a woman's life cycle, bringing about profound physical and psychological changes (Anggraini & Hanim, 2025). Although often regarded as a moment of happiness, this period also carries an emotional burden. Hormonal shifts, which occur as an adaptation for fetal growth and development in the womb, result in deep-seated changes that peak in the third trimester (World Health Organization, 2022). Entering this final period, the emotional burden usually increases because pregnant women begin to face risks and childbirth preparation. This condition causes unstable worry levels and triggers anxiety. Anxiety is a normal reaction when it serves as an adaptive mechanism that helps individuals prepare themselves against threats. Conversely, anxiety can become a mental health issue if it manifests excessively and

uncontrollably, thereby disrupting daily activities (Rochaida, Friscila, Nastiti, & Sarkiah, 2025). Various factors influence anxiety levels in pregnant women, ranging from internal factors such as age, educational level, pregnancy status, and occupation, to external factors including economic status, accessibility to healthcare facilities, and exposure to media information. Furthermore, supportive aspects such as the regularity of Antenatal Care (ANC) visits, as well as support from husbands and families, determine the prevalence rate of anxiety in pregnant women (Asiyah & Aini, 2021). Data from 2022, nearly one in five women suffers from a mental disorder during pregnancy, up to one year postpartum. Globally, approximately 10% of pregnant women experience mental disorders, particularly depression. This prevalence is reported to be higher in developing nations, reaching 15.6%

during pregnancy. This situation is highly concerning because about 20% of mothers experiencing perinatal mental disorders are in a highly vulnerable psychological state, which includes risks of self-harm and suicide attempts (World Health Organization, 2022).

The 2023 Indonesian Health Survey (IHS) results showed a significant increase, with the prevalence of mental and emotional disorders among the population aged 15 and above reaching 10.2%. Banten was recorded as the province with the third highest rate of mental health issues in Indonesia, with a mental emotional disorder prevalence rate of 2.7% (Khairat & Puspita, 2024). Based on a preliminary study at Community Health Center Gunung Kaler, 117 pregnant women were registered from January to February 2026, including 37 in the first trimester, 49 in the second trimester, and 31 in the third trimester. Through interviews with 8 third-trimester pregnant women, it was found that 6 out of 8 pregnant women (75%) experienced anxiety. Specifically, anxiety levels were found to be higher in primigravida pregnant women. Anxiety during pregnancy that is not properly managed can have long-term impacts on both maternal and fetal health (Wijayanti & Rizkiana, 2025). This poor mental health condition often affects maternal health behaviours, leading to sleep disturbances, fatigue, and decreased appetite (Wulandari, Setyorini, Lieskusumastuti, Lestari, & Pratiwi, 2025). Physiologically, anxiety triggers an excessive release of cortisol and adrenaline hormones that stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, resulting in an increased heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure, which elevates the risk of complications such as preeclampsia and miscarriage (Ningsih, Jaya, & Rosyada, 2024).

These impacts are not only felt by the mother but also extend to the fetus. Anxiety causes vasoconstriction in the placenta. This inhibits the supply of oxygen and nutrients to the fetus, which, in the long run, can lead to low birth weight (LBW), increased risk of premature birth, and cognitive and emotional developmental disorders (Ningrum, 2023). Management is required to mitigate the negative

impacts caused by anxiety. Anxiety management can be conducted through pharmacological or non-pharmacological approaches. One effective non-pharmacological therapy used to reduce anxiety is a combination of guided imagery and music therapy. The combination of guided imagery relaxation and music is effective in reducing anxiety by inducing a sense of comfort accompanied by positive imagination (Mukhadiono & Wahyuningsih, 2025). Through the simultaneous engagement of auditory and visual stimulation, this combination is theoretically capable of calming the central nervous system more comprehensively than a single intervention. Demonstrated a reduction in anxiety among pregnant women before and after the intervention, yielding a p-value of 0.000 (Herinawati, Diniyati, Iksaruddin, & Widyawati, 2023). A p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant effect of music therapy on anxiety reduction (Primadani, 2023). There is a highly significant effect of guided imagery and music (GIM) relaxation on the anxiety levels of pregnant women ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) (Sarwinanti & Aristyawati, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

A quantitative approach with a Quasi-Experiment design, utilising a One-Group Pretest-Posttest layout without a control group. The sampling technique used was non-probability, specifically accidental sampling. Based on Roscoe's theory, the sample size was set at 10-20 individuals. The inclusion criteria for this study were pregnant women in their third trimester with primigravida status (first pregnancy), pregnant women experiencing mild anxiety symptoms, capable of reading and writing, and willing to be research subjects. The results of this study outline the effect of the combination of guided imagery and music therapy on the anxiety of third-trimester pregnant women in the Work Area of Community Health Center Gunung Kaler Kabupaten Tangerang. The intervention was performed according to the Standard Operating Procedures for 3 consecutive days. The total number of respondents was 15 people. The research findings are presented below.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Univariate Analysis (N=15)

Variable	Results
Age (n/%) (Mean±SD) (Range) (Year)	(27.5±4.3) (18-38)
20-35	13/86.7
<20 - ≥35	2/13.3
Education (n/%)	
Junior High School	8/53.3
Senior High School	7/46.7
Anxiety Level (n/%)	
Mild	15/100.0
Severe	0/0.0

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics and anxiety levels of the respondents. The mean age of the respondents was 27.5 years (SD = 4.3), with an age range of 18-38 years. Most respondents were between 20 and 35 years of age, accounting for 13 individuals (86.7%), while 2 respondents (13.3%) were younger than 20 years or older than 35 years. Regarding educational attainment, the majority of respondents had completed junior high school (53.3%), while 46.7% had completed senior high school. In terms of anxiety levels, all respondents (100%) were classified as having mild anxiety, and no respondents were categorized as experiencing severe anxiety. These findings indicate that the study participants were predominantly young adults with relatively similar educational backgrounds and mild levels of anxiety prior to the intervention.

Table 2. Before and After Intervention

Variable	Mean	Difference
Pretest	19.6667	6.80000
Posttest	12.8667	

Based on the table, the mean anxiety level before being given the combination intervention of guided imagery and music therapy was 19.6667. After the intervention, it decreased to 12.8667, showing a difference between the pretest and posttest scores of 6.80000.

Table 3. Paired Samples T-Test

Comparison	Mean	Standard Deviation	T Value	Sig
Pre – Post Test	6.8000	2.07709	12.679	0.001

In the table above, a significance value of 0.001 was obtained. This result was derived from measurements comparing pre- and post-intervention values over 3 consecutive days. Thus, the combination of guided imagery and music therapy is considered to have a significant effect on the anxiety of third-trimester pregnant women because the p-

value satisfies the condition to prove the hypothesis, with a value of $0.001 < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

The characteristics of respondents based on age show that out of 15 respondents, the majority were in the non-risk age group (20-35 years old), namely 13

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people (86,7%), while 2 people (13,3%) were in the at-risk age group (<20 years old). The incidence of anxiety was dominated by the 20-35 age group (50%). Despite being within the healthy reproductive age range, third-trimester primigravida pregnant women remain susceptible to anxiety (Widiastini & Sinaga, 2021). Based on this finding, the researcher assumes that even though the respondents were at an ideal age, anxiety was still present because it was their first pregnancy experience (primigravida). Factors such as the lack of prior experience, hormonal changes, and adaptation to the environment triggered the emergence of anxiety. However, supported by ideal age maturity, the respondents possessed fairly good emotional stability, allowing the emerging anxiety to be controlled and remain within the mild anxiety category. The characteristics of respondents by education showed a fairly even distribution: 8 people (53.3%) had a low education level (Elementary–Junior High School), and the other 7 people (46.7%) had a high education level (Senior High School–Higher Education). Educational level does not guarantee that an individual will be free from anxiety (Siregar, Kias, Nurfatimah, Noya, Longgupa, Entoh, & Ramadhan, 2021). In the higher education group, anxiety still occurred due to their first pregnancy status (primigravida), which resulted in a lack of experience regarding the labour process, meaning their knowledge was limited to theory alone (Pertiwi, Marlina, & Masitoh, 2025).

The results showed that before administering the combination of guided imagery and music therapy, all respondents (100%) were in the mild anxiety category with a mean score of 19,66. This anxiety was caused by psychosocial stressors associated with facing the third-trimester labour process, during which respondents began worrying about the fetus's health condition, physical readiness, and the anticipation of pain. Despite these worries, the fact that all respondents only experienced mild anxiety was influenced by strong external factors, such as supportive family environments and intensive assistance from healthcare professionals. Husband support has a positive impact on reducing

psychological disorders in pregnant women. Anxiety is a feeling of fear due to the anticipation of danger, which, to a certain degree, actually helps individuals

become better prepared for childbirth (Swarjana & Skm, 2022). The results indicated that the mean anxiety score of third-trimester pregnant women after receiving the intervention experienced a substantial decrease, dropping from 19.66 to 12.86, with a reduction difference of 6.80. Although categorically all respondents remained within the mild anxiety level, a significant decrease in the mean value occurred within that scale. This reduction in scores indicates that the intervention was effective in reducing anxiety symptoms.

The guided imagery process works by directing the respondents' imagination toward soothing visual scenes, which are then reinforced by accompanying music to induce a deeper state of relaxation. This cognitive stimulation through imagination helps respondents divert their attention from childbirth worries, while the musical accompaniment enhances parasympathetic nervous responses, lowering bodily tension. The mechanism of anxiety reduction in this combination therapy occurs through the modification of nervous system responses. When a pregnant woman reaches a phase of positive imagination accompanied by music, parasympathetic nerve activity is stimulated, suppressing the sympathetic nerves active during anxiety, thereby triggering the release of endorphin hormones and lowering cortisol levels (Erisy, Putriana, Risneni, & Pranajaya, 2024).

The study found a highly significant decrease in pretest and posttest anxiety scores ($p = 0.001$; $\alpha < 0.05$). Consequently, it can be stated that the combination of guided imagery and music therapy has a significant effect on the anxiety levels of third-trimester pregnant women in the Work Area. This combination is effective in reducing anxiety because it creates positive changes in the form of feelings of calm, relaxation, and emotional readiness when facing childbirth. Guided imagery and music therapy treatments are consistently effective in reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women. The combination therapy of guided imagery and music affects anxiety in pregnant women through visual and auditory stimulation. Conceptually, this therapy operates via a cognitive distraction mechanism, guiding individuals to imagine pleasant experiences through their senses. At the same time, the strain of music serves as a relaxation enhancer to achieve a profound state of calm (Ningrum, 2023). The mechanism by which this combination reduces anxiety involves modifying

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nervous system responses. When a pregnant woman enters a positive imagination phase accompanied by music, parasympathetic activity is stimulated, inhibiting the active sympathetic nervous system, thereby triggering endorphin release and decreasing cortisol levels. This process creates psychological serenity that helps pregnant women transform their perception of pain and fear approaching childbirth into a more stable emotional state. Moreover, integrating music into this serene environment not only solidifies the relaxation effect but also makes it easier for individuals to focus on receiving positive suggestions optimally (Pasambo, Kaunang, Tamunu, Sarimin, & Tuegeh, 2023). Based on these descriptions, the researcher assumes that when third-trimester pregnant women focus on positive aspects through guided imagery accompanied by music therapy, their sense of identity and self-confidence will increase significantly. This delivers a direct impact, leading to a more positive mood and effectively lowering the stress and anxiety symptoms felt before delivery. This mechanism works by repeatedly directing the pregnant woman's mind toward positive imaginations at the subconscious level, so that anxiety symptoms decrease because the subconscious mind has been conditioned to always respond to labour stressors more calmly and positively (Zulfa, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The combination of guided imagery and music therapy was effective in reducing anxiety levels among third-trimester pregnant women in the study area. Before the intervention, all 15 respondents (100%) were classified as having mild anxiety, with a mean anxiety score of 19.67. After receiving the combined intervention for three consecutive days, all respondents remained within the mild anxiety category; however, the mean anxiety score decreased to 12.87. The mean reduction in anxiety score was 6.80 points. Furthermore, the paired t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-intervention anxiety scores ($p = 0.001$), indicating that the combination of guided imagery and music therapy significantly reduced anxiety among third-trimester pregnant women. Therefore, the research hypothesis was accepted.

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