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The effect of reminiscence therapy on psychological well-being of the elderly: A systematic review

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Abstract

Background: Aging increases health problems, decreases physical abilities and daily activities that reduce the psychological well-being of the elderly. The aging process is accompanied by psychological problems, such as: increased symptoms of depression, stress, anxiety, and mental well-being problems. Research interventions to improve psychological well-being of elderly have been widely investigated. One of the therapies that has been widely researched and developed is reminiscence therapy, so the research question of the systematic review is how does reminiscence therapy affect psychological well-being of elderly.
Purpose: To determine the effect of reminiscence therapy on the psychological well-being of the elderly.
Method: A systematic search review of 3 databases: ProQuest, Science Direct, and Wiley Online Library in February 2025 to identify all relevant peer-reviewed journal articles. Based on the search results with the keywords reminiscence therapy and (parents or elderly or elderly) and (psychology of well-being or depression or anxiety or emotional) obtained 63,002. Furthermore, the journal article limiter (scientific journal, the last 5 years 2020-2025, English, nursing psychology journal) obtained 819 articles. Then the screening compiled the title and abstract obtained 23 articles, then the screening by reading the article as a whole obtained 10 articles, after the article criticism/critical assessment was carried out, 8 journals were analyzed in this systematic review.
Results: Shows that reminiscence therapy can improve well-being, reduce depression, increase life satisfaction, increase self-esteem, increase meaning in life, increase a sense of cohesion, improve problem-solving skills, reduce anxiety about death, and improve the ability of older adults to adapt to aging.
Conclusion: Reminiscence therapy is effective to improve psychological well-being of the elderly. The application of reminiscence therapy can be carried out in health service practices, both elderly in nursing homes and in the community.
Suggestion: It is hoped that a more comprehensive systematic review can be developed by conducting a review of previous literature, searching for articles from various databases, and exploring other sources such as the web and others.

Keywords: Elderly; Psychological Well-Being; Reminiscence.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing number of elderly people requires attention to the elderly quality of life. WHO explains four factors influencing person's quality of life, these are: physical, psychological, social, and environmental conditions (Kiling & Kiling-Bunga, 2019). Aging increases health problems, decreases physical abilities and daily activities which reduce the psychological well-being of the elderly (Pourebrahim & Rasouli, 2019). The aging process is accompanied by psychological problems, such as: increased symptoms of depression, stress, anxiety, and mental well-being issues (Wang, Wang, Leung, Ng, Chan, Wong, Chan, Liu, Wong, & Lum, 2025). Efforts to improve psychological and social well-being can be

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used as targets to promote healthy aging (Kim, Tkatch, Martin, MacLeod, Sandy, & Yeh, 2021).

There are six main dimensions of psychological well-being, namely: individuals are able to accept themselves, establish positive relationships with others, have autonomy, control their environment, have a purpose in life, and experience personal development (Hidayati & Choliq, 2023; Ravelia, 2019). There is an opinion that the subjective well-being of elderly individuals is more influenced by their interpretation of their circumstances than by the circumstances themselves (Elhgry, Abd elwahab, & Ibrahim, 2020). Factors that affect psychological well-being in the elderly are: personal, cognitive, emotional, social, and other factors. The level of psychological well-being is higher in the elderly who do not feel lonely and have enough opportunities to communicate, who involve in social life and live with relatives (Kovalenko & Spivak, 2018). Psychological well-being in elderly needs developed. With psychological well-being, the elderly will be happier and feel life satisfaction, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness, unhappiness, and depression (Amalia, 2016).

Research related to appropriate interventions to improve psychological well-being in the elderly has been widely conducted. One of the therapies that has been researched and developed is reminiscence therapy (Shin, Kim, Kim, & Sok, 2023). There has been much research of the effectiveness reminiscence therapy in improving various psychological aspects and reducing pathological psychological aspects. Reminiscence therapy is an appropriate intervention to improve psychological adjustment, learned resources, self-efficacy, social support, and mental health in nursing home residents (Zhang, Huang, & Xiao, 2024). Similar studies highlight the positive effects reminiscence therapy of the elderly psychological well-being. Reminiscence therapy makes a chance of recollection and sharing positive memories, which can increase self-esteem, reduces feelings loneliness, and reduces depression. In addition, reminiscence groups provide social interaction and also emotional support, which contribute to improve psychological well-being (Yanagida, Yamaguchi, & Matsunari, 2024; Tam, Poon, Mahendran, Kua, & Wu, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

A systematic review of the literature was conducted on 3 databases: ProQuest, ScienDirect, and Wiley Online Library in February 2025 to identify all relevant peer-reviewed journal articles. Based on the search results with the keywords “reminiscence therapy and (older aduth or older people or elderly) and (psychology well being or depression or anxiety or emotional)” 63,002 articles were obtained.

Then the journal article limiter was carried out (scholarly journals, last 5 years 2020-2025, English Language, journal nursing psychology, open access) and 819 articles were obtained. Furthermore, the title and abstract were screened to obtain 23 appropriate articles. Then, screening was carried out by reading the entire article by selecting articles that tested the effectiveness of reminiscence therapy with the output of psychological wellbeing in the elderly, according of inclusion and exclusion category, 10 articles remained. The inclusion category are publication year 2020-2025, research articles, randomized control trial design or non-RCT experimental, in English, the study population is elderly aged 60 years and over.

Furthermore, a critical appraisal was conducted. Based on the results of the critical appraisal, 8 articles were taken to be analyzed in this systematic review. The articles are: five from ProQuest, two from Science Direct, and one from Wiley Online Library. The eight articles are articles with experimental research types (pre-post comparison, single-blind pre-post test, quasi-experiment, and randomized controlled trial. Two articles are from Spain, one from Spain and Mexico, one from Iran, one from Egypt, one from Japan, one from Portugal, and one from the Czech Republic. The articles are written in English.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

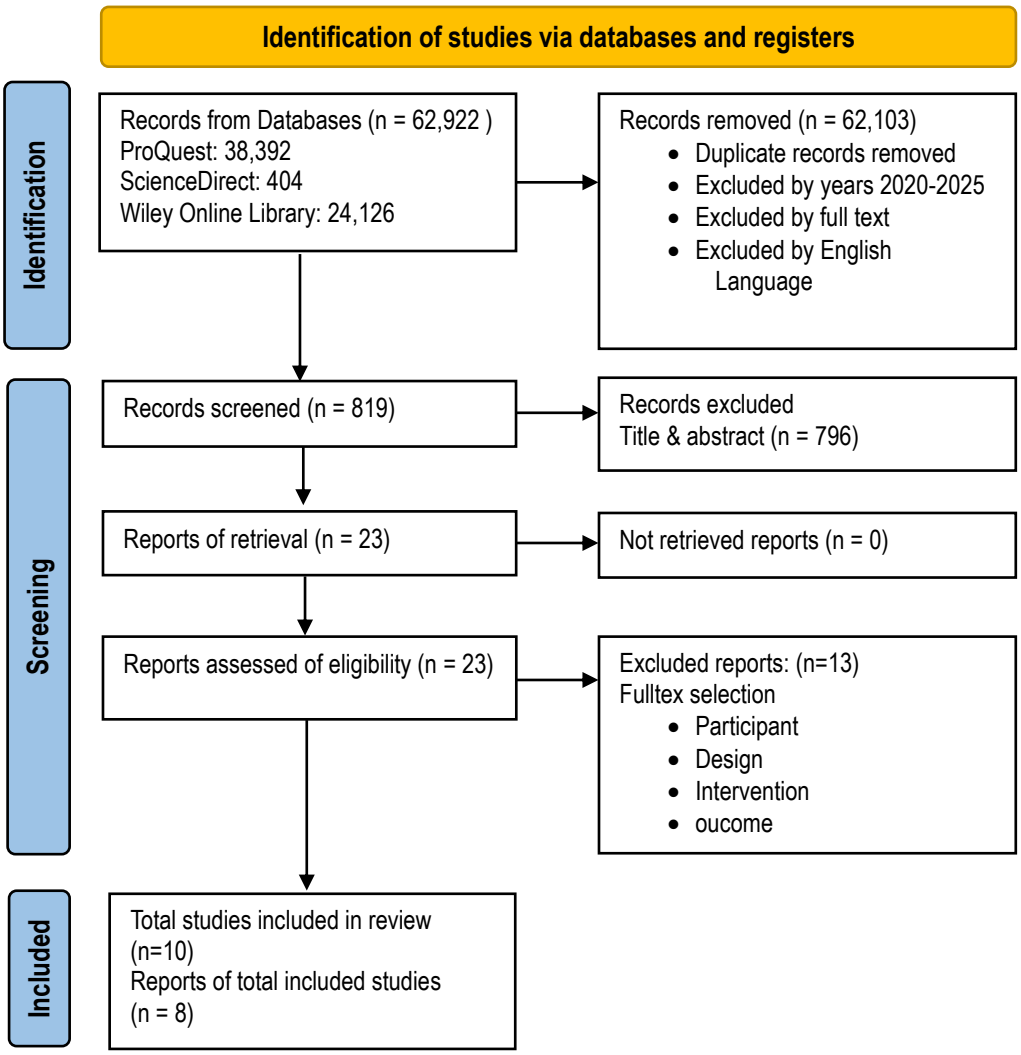


Figure PRISMA Flow Diagram

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Table Summary of the Review Articles

(Author, Year) (Country)	Research Design and Sample	Intervention Types & Techniques	Characteristics of Intervention	Instrument	Outcome
(Abdel-Aziz & Ahmed, 2021) (Egypt)	Quasi-experimental with 50 elderly people, at random: 25 elderly intervention group, 25 elderly control group	Intervention group: reminiscence therapy; Control group: regular club program	- The intervention group received 10 sessions of reminiscence therapy - 1 time a week for one hour (60 minutes)	- SES (Self esteem scale) - MHC-SF (The Mental Health Continuum Short Form) - ERQ (Emotion Regulation Questionnaire) - (SWLS) Satisfaction With Life Scale	- RT increases self-esteem ($p < 0.01$) - RT increases the dimensions of emotional well-being ($p < 0.01$)
(Sales et al., 2022) (Spanish)	Pre-post test, single-blind RCT with 29 elderly women: randomized to control group: 17, intervention group: 12	Intervention group: reminiscence therapy; Control group: routine program	- Ten sessions reminiscence - For six weeks - Two sessions in week - 90 minutes each sessions - Conducted by psychologist trained and expert	- Purpose-in-Life Test (PIL) - Sense of Coherence (SOC-13) - Brief Cope Inventory (COPE-28)	- RT Effectively increases the meaning of life ($p<0.01$) - RT Increases sense of coherence ($p < 0.01$) - RT Improves problem-solving skills in elderly women ($p < 0.01$)
(Bazrafshan et al., 2022) (Iran)	Simple random sampling method with 32 elderly, divided by RCT, 16 intervention groups, and 16 control groups.	Intervention group: reminiscence therapy; Control group: routine program	RT 12 sessions	- DCQ (Demographic Characteristics Questionnaire) - MMSE (Mini Mental Status Examination) - TDA (Templer Death Anxiety) - AAQ (Aging Adjustment Questionnaires)	- RT effectively reduces anxiety about death in the elderly ($P<0.05$) - RT increases the elderly's ability to adapt to old age ($P<0.05$)

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(Author, Year) (Country)	Research Design and Sample	Intervention Types & Techniques	Characteristics of Intervention	Instrument	Outcome
(Satorres et al., 2021) (Spanish)	Randomly assigned to the treatment or control group with 139 elderly people; 71 intervention groups, and 68 control group.	Intervention group: reminiscence therapy; Control group: routine program	- 10 sessions - One session per week for 2 hours - Facilitator: psychologist	- RFS (Reminiscence Functions Scale) - GDS (Geriatric Depression Scale) Yesavage	- Significant increase in positive self-functioning in the form of: problem solving and death preparation - Significant reduction in negative self-functioning in the form of: revival of bitterness - Increased maintenance of intimacy - Significant improvement in prosocial functions in the form of: conversation.
(Yanagida et al., 2024) (Japan)	Pre-post comparative design with 49 elderly respondents with moderate to severe dementia living in nursing homes	Pre-post comparative design with one group intervention	- 8 sessions of reminiscence therapy (4 weeks) - Facilitated by trained staff	- HDSR (Hasegawa Dementia Scale Revised) - NPI-NH (Neuropsychiatric Inventory Nursing Home Version) - PGC Morale Scale (Revised Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale)	- RT did not significantly improve HDS-R scores - RT improves significanly of the elderly psychological (PGC Morale Scale (p = 0.0417) - RT reduces behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia (NPI-NH p=0.02)
(Gil et al., 2022) (Portugal)	Quasy Experimental with 76 elderly people divided: 50 in RT program and	RT intervention group and CST intervention group	- Each RT and CST intervention consisted of 14 sessions. - Twice a week	- 6-CIT - IADL - TFI (Tilburg Frailty Indicator)	- RT improves cognitive function especially in the early stages of cognitive decline.

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(Author, Year) (Country)	Research Design and Sample	Intervention Types & Techniques	Characteristics of Intervention	Instrument	Outcome
	26 in CST program.		- Duration of each 45-60 minutes - Group based - Trained facilitators	- MoCA - GDS-10 - WHOQOL-OLD-8	- RT improves quality of life for the elderly compared to CST
(Rueda et al., 2023) (Mexico & Spanish)	Randomized design, pre–post measurements with 144 elderly: 77 Spain (45 in intervention group and 32 in control group) and 67 from Mexico (34 in experimental group and 33 in control group)	- Reminiscence therapy in Mexican and Spanish - Cognitive stimulation in Mexican and Spanish control groups	- 12 positive reminiscence sessions - 12 groups with 6 groups in each country - In healthy aging, mild cognitive impairment, and Alzheimer's disease	- LSI-A (Life Satisfaction Inventory Adult version) - AMT EPOS (Autobiographical memory test positive specific memories recall) - AMT ENEG (Autobiographical memory test negative specific memories recall)	- The REMPOS effect shows generalizable effects across countries, but research is needed to test the differential effects of cross-cultural differences.
(Zelenikova et al., 2024) (Czech Republic)	Prospective uncontrolled pretest/post-test intervention study with 24 seniors in the community	One group reminiscence intervention	- Four reminiscence groups, each group 6-8 participants - One session a week - For 12 weeks - 60 minutes each sessions - Led by a facilitator.	- GDS-15 - GAI - RSES - OPQOL-BRIEF - SOC 13	- Significant in reducing depression (Cohen's D=0.870; 95% CI: 0.392 to 1.335) - Increased self-esteem (Cohen's D=0.612; 95% CI: −1.044 to −0.170) - Decreased anxiety (Cohen's D=0.543; 95% CI: 0.108 to 0.967),

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DISCUSSION

This interventional study examined the effect of reminiscence therapy on the self-esteem and emotional well-being of the elderly. The study participants consisted of 50 elderly people, randomly divided into 25 into the intervention group and 25 into the control group. In the intervention group, 10 reminiscence therapy sessions were conducted once a week for 60 minutes, while the control group received a regular program. The results showed an increase in self-esteem and emotional well-being in the intervention group compared to the control group ($p < 0.01$) (Abdel-Aziz & Ahmed, 2021). This suggests that reminiscence therapy can improve the psychological well-being of the elderly, which is also supported by previous research on the effect of reminiscence therapy on the meaning of life, feelings of coherence, and coping skills of elderly women in nursing homes during Covid-19. The results reported that reminiscence therapy was effective in increasing meaning of life, feelings of coherence, and improving problem-solving skills ($p < 0.01$) (Sales, Pinazo-Hernandis, & Martinez, 2022).

Furthermore, other factors that can influence the psychological well-being of the elderly are those related to death anxiety and adaptation. A recent study examined the effect of reminiscence therapy on death anxiety and adaptation in the elderly. Participants in this study consisted of 32 elderly people who were randomly divided into 16 people in the intervention group and 16 people in the control group. The intervention group received 12 sessions of reminiscence therapy. The results reported that reminiscence therapy was effective in reducing death anxiety and increasing the elderly's capacity to adapt to old conditions ($p <0.05$) (Bazrafshan, Faramarzian, Soufi, & Delam, 2022). This is also consistent with a study of 139 elderly people who were divided into 71 people in the intervention group and 68 people in the control group. The intervention group received 10 sessions of reminiscence therapy, conducted one session per week for 2 hours by a psychologist facilitator. The results showed a significant increase in positive functions in the form of problem-solving and death preparation; a reduction in negative self-functions in the form of bitterness revival; and an increase in maintaining intimacy. and increased prosocial functions in the form of conversation (Satorres, Delhom, & Meléndez, 2021).

Further research was conducted on 49 elderly people with moderate to severe dementia living in nursing homes in Japan. The results reported that reminiscence significantly improved psychological well-being and reduced depressive behavior (behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia) in elderly people with dementia (Yanagida et al., 2024). Another study compared the effects of reminiscence therapy with cognitive stimulation therapy in elderly people with cognitive decline. The results showed improvements in cognitive function in both the RT and CST groups, but improvements in quality of life scores, which also include psychological aspects, were only observed in the RT group (Gil, Santos-Costa, Bobrowicz-Campos, Silva, de Lurdes Almeida, & Apóstolo, 2022). Research on the effects of reminiscence therapy in elderly groups has been conducted in various countries. Furthermore, previous research examined the cross-cultural impact of reminiscence therapy on life satisfaction and autobiographical memory in elderly people in Mexico and Spain. The results indicated a generalizable effect of positive memories, but research is needed to examine the differential effects of cross-cultural differences (Rueda, Cabaco, Mejía-Ramírez, Afonso, & Castillo-Riedel, 2023).

In addition, reminiscence therapy can be done to the older adulth that living in the community. Research on reminiscence therapy on depression, anxiety, and self-esteem in the elderly in the community showed significant results in reducing depression with Cohen's D = 0.870; increasing self esteem with Cohen's D = 0.612, and reducing anxiety with Cohen's D = 0.543 (Zeleníková, Hosáková, Kozáková, Bobčíková, & Bužgová, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Reminiscence therapy can improve the psychological well-being of the elderly, including improving emotional well-being, reducing depression, increasing life satisfaction, increasing self-esteem, increasing the meaning of life, increasing the sense of coherence, increasing the ability to overcome problems, reducing anxiety about death, and increasing the ability of the elderly to adapt to old age conditions.

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SUGGESTION

It is hoped that a more comprehensive systematic review can be developed by conducting a review of previous literature, searching for articles from various databases, and exploring other sources such as the web and others.

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