



The Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) Therapy Combined with Dhikr to Overcome Thanatophobia in the Older People

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A B S T R A C T

Older adults are a phase of human life accompanied by a decline in physical, psychological, and social conditions. These changes have the potential to cause mental health issues such as thanatophobia or an excessive and irrational fear of death. One way to overcome is through non-pharmacological therapy, the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy, combined with dhikr. This study evaluates the effectiveness of SEFT therapy combined with dhikr as a complementary intervention in geriatric nursing on thanatophobia levels in older adults. It employed a pre-experimental design with a one-group pretest-posttest design. There were 24 respondents with a total sampling technique. The independent variable was the combination of SEFT therapy and dhikr, and the dependent variable was the levels of thanatophobia. The instrument was a Thanatophobia questionnaire. Therapy was conducted in four sessions over a period of two weeks, with each session lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Data analysis used the Wilcoxon signed-rank test with a significance level of $p < 0.05$. Pre-test results showed that most respondents experienced very high levels of thanatophobia (70.83%), with the average score reaching 45. After intervention, the average score dropped to 15, and most respondents (87.5%) fell into the mild thanatophobia levels. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test obtained a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the SEFT therapy and dhikr were significantly effective in reducing thanatophobia levels in respondents. The SEFT therapy combined with dhikr could be an alternative complementary nursing intervention in overcoming thanatophobia among older people.

INTRODUCTION

Elderly life is characterized by a decline in physical, psychological, and social functioning, which can lead to various health problems, including psychological disorders such as Thanatophobia (Nurrohmah and Rinaldi, 2022). Thanatophobia is an excessive and irrational fear of death, which can lead to symptoms such as chronic anxiety, avoidance of conversations or situations related to death, and disruption to daily activities (Nurjanah and N, 2019).

The increase in the elderly population globally and nationally potentially increases problems such as thanatophobia. In Indonesia, as of 2019, there were 25.9 million older adults (9.7%), and this number is projected to increase to 48.2 million (15.77%) by 2035. Globally, the number of older adults reached 727 million in 2020 and is projected to grow to 1.5 billion by 2050 (Halid, 2021). As they age, older people are more susceptible to loneliness, depression, and other psychosocial disorders, exacerbating the fear of death or Thanatophobia (Nuroh, 2022). This phenomenon was discovered in Dahan Rejo Lor, Gresik Regency; 24 older people showed signs and symptoms of thanatophobia. Thus, effective psychosocial

interventions are critical, particularly given the limited access to mental health services in the area (Jasmita, 2024).

Thanatophobia is influenced by many factors, such as old age, traumatic experiences, deteriorating health, the loss of a loved one, and anxiety. According to Freud's psychoanalytic perspective, the fear of death is also linked to the subconscious human desire for immortality (Saefudin, 2020). Therefore, interventions should not only focus on psychological aspects but also on spiritual aspects to help older adults confront this fear comprehensively.

One alternative intervention that is increasingly being used in complementary nursing is the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy combined with dhikr. SEFT is a technique that combines stimulation of energy points in the body (similar to acupressure) with spiritual affirmations to manage emotional disturbances and anxiety. In addition, dhikr is a form of Islamic worship in which phrases or prayers are repeatedly recited to remind oneself of God. It has a calming effect that can provide inner calm and a sense of peace. The combination of the two is believed to help older adults reduce anxiety, accept the reality of death, and improve their quality of life (Nurjanah and N, 2019; Saefudin, 2020). SEFT therapy combined with dhikr offers a holistic approach that relies not only on modern psychological techniques but also incorporates spirituality as an essential part of the emotional healing process. Through this therapy, older adults potentially can become calmer, more accepting, and more prepared to face death as part of the human life cycle. This study evaluates the effectiveness of SEFT therapy combined with dhikr as a complementary intervention in geriatric nursing on thanatophobia levels in older adults.

METHOD

This study employed a pre-experimental design with a One-Group Pre-Test and Post-Test Design. In this design, a group of subjects was given a pre-test before the intervention, then received treatment, and then a post-test was administered to measure the changes that occurred (Nursalam, 2020). This study was conducted from January 6 to 18, 2025, in Dahan Rejo Lor, Gresik Regency. The study respondents were all 24 older adults with Thanatophobia in Dahan Rejo Lor, Gresik Regency, selected using a total sampling technique. Inclusion criteria included individuals aged 60 years or older, diagnosed with thanatophobia, able to communicate, physically and mentally stable, and willing to sign an informed consent form. Older people with severe cognitive impairment, psychiatric disorders, terminal illnesses, or psychotropic dependence were excluded from the study. The independent variable in this study was SEFT therapy combined with dhikr, while the dependent variable was the level of thanatophobia in older people. Therapy was conducted in four sessions over a period of two weeks, with each session lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Each session included brief education about thanatophobia and the implementation of SEFT therapy, combined with the recitation of the dhikr: "*Laa haula wala quwwata illa billah*", meaning there

is no might nor power except with Allah. The instrument used to measure the dependent variable was the Thanatophobia Scale (Sinoff, 2017), which consisted of 10 statements with a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The total score ranged from 10 to 50, with interpretations from low to very high levels. After the data were collected through pre-test and post-test, editing and coding processes were carried out, and then analyzed using univariate analysis for frequency distribution and bivariate analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test with a confidence level of $\alpha < 0.05$ to determine the significance of changes in the before-and-after values. The Authors paid attention to the principles of anonymity, informed consent, and confidentiality in maintaining research ethics, and the number of ethical clearances was No. 112/56/456.10/2024.

RESULT

This research was conducted in Dahan Rejo Lor, Kebomas District, Gresik Regency. This area was chosen because it had an elderly community that actively participates in the community health post (*Posbindu*) and engages in religious activities, such as dhikr and regular religious studies. A strong social environment and the support of health workers are essential factors in implementing the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy combined with dhikr to overcome thanatophobia (excessive fear of death) in the elderly. Table 1 shows that most respondents are women (75%). Half of them have an age range of 60–69 years (54.16%), are elementary school graduates (50%), and have no serious illnesses (54.16%).

Table 1. Characteristics of Older Adults with Thanatophobia in Dahan Rejo Lor, Gresik

Characteristics of Respondents	Frequency (n)	Percentage
Sex		
Male	6	25%
Female	18	75%
Age		
60 – 69 years old	13	54.16%
70 – 74 years old	6	25%
75 – 80 years old	5	20.83%
Education		
Unschooling	0	0%
Elementary School	12	50%
Junior High School	2	8.33%
Senior High School	9	37.5%
University	1	4.16%
Medical History		
Hipertension	5	20.83%
Osteoarthritis	6	25%
No serious illnesses	13	54.16%
Total	14	100%

Before the intervention, a pre-test was conducted using the Thanatophobia Scale. The results showed that most respondents had very high levels of anxiety (70.83%), with the remainder having high levels (29.17%). After four sessions of SEFT intervention combined with dhikr over two weeks, a post-test was conducted. The results showed a significant decrease in thanatophobia levels. Twenty-one respondents

(87.5%) experienced a decline in their scores to the mild (normal) category, while three others decreased to the moderate (normal) category. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test yielded a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), meaning there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores (Table 2). The SEFT therapy combined with dhikr was effective in reducing thanatophobia levels in the respondents.

Table 2. The effect of SEFT therapy combined with dhikr on the level of thanatophobia

Thanatophobia Levels	Pre Test		Post Test		p
	n	%	n	%	
Low or Normal (10 – 20)	0	0	18	75	0.000
Moderate or Normal (21 – 30)	0	0	6	25	
High or Abnormal (31 – 40)	7	29.17	0	0	
Very high or Abnormal (41 – 50)	17	70.83	0	0	
Total	24	200	24	100	

Thus, the SEFT therapy combined with dhikr could be an alternative complementary nursing intervention based on spirituality and emotion in older people.

DISCUSSION

Thanatophobia Before The SEFT Therapy Combined with Dhikr

Pre-test results showed that most respondents experienced very high levels of thanatophobia. The average score reached 45 (Table 2). It indicates that fear of death dominated the respondents' thoughts and feelings before the intervention. Several factors contributed to this condition, including: the majority of respondents were women, had low levels of education, and had chronic illnesses such as hypertension and osteoarthritis (Table 1). It aligns with a study, which found that older age, medical history, and education level contributed to high levels of death anxiety (Nursalam, 2020). Although the local community in this study had a strong religious background, as evidenced by their habit of attending religious studies and dhikr, these practices had not been effective enough to overcome thanatophobia. According to the Emotional Energy Theory in SEFT, fear is rooted in negative energy blockages and must be addressed by stimulating meridian points, combined with spiritual affirmations (Safira Nahar Fitriana and Padoli, 2021). Furthermore, the practice of dhikr can be linked to a mindfulness approach, which involves an effort to increase present-moment awareness and accept uncertainty, including the inevitability of death. A study by Kibtyah et al. (2024) found that dhikr had been shown to reduce existential anxiety.

Thanatophobia After SEFT Therapy Combined with Dhikr

After four sessions of intervention over two weeks, there was a significant decrease in thanatophobia scores. The average score dropped to 15, and most respondents (87.5%) fell into the mild thanatophobia levels (Table 2). The effectiveness of this therapy was not only evident in the numbers, but also in the changes in respondents' attitudes, who became calmer, more open in discussing death, and felt more spiritually prepared. These findings are supported by research by Juniarni et al. (2022), which showed that

dhikr can calm the nervous system and increase feelings of security in older adults experiencing anxiety. It can increase spiritual calm and self-acceptance of death. A study also confirmed that SEFT therapy could reduce emotional disturbances by restoring the body's energy balance (Safira Nahar Fitriana and Padoli, 2021). It has a working mechanism that balances emotional energy through tapping techniques on the body's meridian points, thereby calming the brain's limbic system, which is the center of emotional regulation. The SEFT therapy combined with dhikr is considered more easily accepted because it is non-invasive, aligns with religious values, and does not cause dependence like sedatives. Respondents in this study appeared to be more responsive to this spiritual-psychological approach than conventional medical or clinical psychology-based therapy.

The Effect of the SEFT Therapy and Dhikr on Thanatophobia in Older People

The SEFT therapy and dhikr were significantly effective in reducing thanatophobia levels in respondents. Post-test results showed a decrease in anxiety from very high to low, with an average score dropping to 17.2 ± 2.5 . This decrease was confirmed by the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, with a p -value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference between the pre- and post-intervention conditions (Table 2). The intervention in this study approach integrates two essential dimensions of well-being in older people: spirituality and emotional management. The SEFT therapy works by tapping on meridian points on the body while reciting positive and spiritual affirmations, whereas dhikr helps individuals accept their destiny, let go of life's burdens, and strengthen their bond with God (Arroisi & Syamil, 2025). In addition to this intervention, the religious social environment in Dahan Rejo Lor also contributed to facilitating the acceptance of the intervention.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, tummy time exercises can significantly increase gross motor skills in babies aged 3-6 months. Parents should apply tummy time exercises to babies regularly to promote the development of gross motor skills in babies aged 3-6 months, enabling them to achieve gross motor milestones more quickly.

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