Breaking the Chains of Stigma: Psychodrama and Kuda Lumping Unite to Empower Cancer Patients in Society

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Cancer, a formidable and life-altering disease, often carries with it a heavy burden of stigma that devastates not only the physical well-being of patients but also their emotional and social lives. The deep-rooted fear and misconceptions about cancer lead to alienation, isolation, and an exacerbation of the patient's suffering. This study embarks on an audacious journey to challenge this stigma by merging the therapeutic power of psychodrama with the rich cultural heritage of Kuda Lumping, a Javanese traditional performance symbolizing strength, resilience, and unity. Using a bold, participatory action research approach, this intervention weaves together the art of psychodrama with cultural rituals, inviting cancer patients, their families, and the broader community to engage in a profound collective experience. The result? A revolutionary shift in perception. Through powerful role-playing and symbolic acts, participants broke down barriers of fear, ignorance, and judgment. The Kuda Lumping dance became more than just a performance—it became a transformative ritual that empowered both patients and community members to confront and dismantle the stigma surrounding cancer. By the end of the intervention, 80% of participants reported a profound shift in their understanding of cancer, with 70% expressing newfound empathy and commitment to supporting those affected by the disease. This study underscores the transformative power of combining psychological therapy with cultural heritage, offering a powerful blueprint for future health interventions. It stands as a testament to the potential of psychodrama, enriched with local cultural elements, to heal and unite communities, and to finally break the chains of cancer stigma that have long bound society in silence and fear.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the diseases that still causes fear and stigma in society. This stigma often causes sufferers to feel isolated and lack adequate social support[1]. People tend to have a negative view of cancer, which not only impacts the psychological state of sufferers, but also hinders prevention efforts and appropriate treatment[2][3].

Psychodrama is a therapeutic method that uses role play to help individuals express emotions, explore internal conflicts, and find solutions to their problems [4], [5], [6]. In this context, Kuda Lumping as a form of traditional performing arts was chosen because of its closeness to the Javanese people and symbolic value that reflects courage and toughness[7]. It is important to know the effectiveness of Kuda Lumping's culture-based psychodrama in reducing the stigma against cancer in the community.

Cancer is one of the non-communicable diseases that has a significant impact on the physical, psychological, and social conditions of its sufferers. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) shows that cancer cases continue to increase every year, with an estimated 19.3 million new cases and 10 million deaths in 2020 [8]. Although various treatment efforts have been developed, social stigma towards cancer patients is still an obstacle in the recovery process and quality of life of patients[9], [10]. The stigma appears in the form of discrimination, social exclusion, and negative stereotypes that worsen the patient's psychological condition[11]. Therefore, an intervention strategy that focuses not only on the medical aspect, but also on the psychosocial aspect is needed to reduce this stigma[12], [13].

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One of the approaches that is considered effective in overcoming psychological stigma and pressure is psychodrama. Psychodrama is a therapeutic technique that allows individuals to explore internal conflicts, feelings, and emotions through specific roles in a simulated drama [14], [15], [16], [17]. Through psychodrama, cancer patients and community members can build emotional awareness, increase empathy, and improve social relationships[18], [19]. However, the implementation of psychodrama in Indonesia still faces challenges in terms of cultural acceptance and local community involvement[20], [21], [22], [23]. For this reason, the integration of local cultural elements in psychodrama is a strategy that is predicted to be effective[24]. One cultural form that has great potential is the Lumping Horse, which symbolically represents the strength, resilience, and solidarity of the community[20], [21], [22].

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of psychodrama with the Kuda Lumping cultural approach in reducing stigma against cancer patients in the community. By incorporating elements of Kuda Lumping culture into the practice of psychodrama, it is hoped that emotional and cultural involvement will emerge that strengthens public acceptance of cancer patients. This research will also examine how the process of dramatization through the symbols and rituals of the Lumping Horse can build empathy, reduce social discomfort, and improve the quality of social relations between cancer patients and society.

Several previous studies have shown the effectiveness of psychodrama in overcoming stigma and improving the mental health of cancer patients. Some of the research conducted by[25], [26]. shows that psychodrama is able to increase confidence and reduce anxiety symptoms in cancer patients. In addition, a study by[27] It also revealed that culture-based therapies can increase psychosocial effectiveness in local communities. However, until now, there has not been much research that examines the integration between psychodrama and local cultural elements, especially in the context of cancer stigma in Indonesia.

This research seeks to fill the gap in the literature by offering an innovative approach, namely combining psychodrama with the culture of Kuda Lumping as a strategy to reduce the stigma of cancer in society. This research will not only make a theoretical contribution to the study of psychology and sociology, but also provide practical benefits in the development of cultural-based social and health intervention programs in Indonesia.

Several studies that discuss this issue include a study entitled "The Effect of Psychodrama on Improving COVID-19 Health Protocol Compliance Behavior for Schizophrenic Patients", which aims to evaluate the effectiveness of psychodrama therapy in increasing schizophrenic patients' compliance with health protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic[28]. The results showed that psychodrama significantly improved patient compliance behavior, highlighting the potential for psychodrama in modifying individual behavior and perception of health issues. These findings can be adapted to reduce stigma against cancer patients through a similar approach.

The next research entitled "The Application of the Sociodrama Method in Health Promotion on Early Detection of Mental Health Disorders" by [29], although the study focused on tuberculosis, the approach used is relevant to the cancer context. This study highlights the importance of public education in improving health literacy to reduce stigma against tuberculosis patients. The authors suggest the use of psychodrama as an effective method in counseling to convey health messages emotionally and deeply, which can be applied in an effort to reduce stigma against cancer patients.

Research [30] which discusses Sociocultural Factors that Inhibit Breast Cancer Screening Behavior in Women: Systematic Review", examines sociocultural factors that inhibit women in breast cancer screening. The findings suggest that stigma, family support, cultural norms, myths, fatalism, and language barriers are the main inhibiting factors. This research emphasizes the importance of culture-based interventions to overcome these barriers, which is in line with the approach of integrating the Kuda Lumping culture in psychodrama to reduce the stigma of cancer in society. The three studies above provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of psychodrama and culture-based approaches in reducing stigma towards illness, which can be a solid foundation for research.

Research on the stigma of cancer patients has become a global concern due to its significant impact on the psychological and social conditions of patients. Stigma against cancer patients not only affects self-confidence and emotional well-being, but also affects the quality of care and social acceptance in the community[2], [31], [32], [33]. Although there has been a lot of research focusing on stigma management through health education and counseling, culturally oriented psychosocial approaches are still rarely explored in depth, especially in the context of Indonesian culture.

Psychodrama has been recognized as one of the effective therapeutic methods in improving mental health and improving social interaction[5]. In psychodrama, individuals play a specific role in expressing emotions and overcoming internal conflicts, thus allowing for reflection and emotional reinforcement[34], [35]. Some Studies Conducted [36], [37], [38] shows that psychodrama can increase confidence and lower anxiety levels of cancer patients. However, the study has not considered aspects of local culture in the practice of psychodrama.

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The integration of cultural elements in psychodrama is an innovative strategy that has not been widely studied. The Lumping Horse, as a symbol of community strength and solidarity, has the potential to amplify the effects of psychodrama in overcoming cancer stigma[39]. Culture-based approaches have proven effective in increasing public acceptance of health issues in a variety of contexts[40], [41]. Therefore, combining psychodrama with elements of the Kuda Lumping culture can create deeper emotional engagement and improve social dynamics among cancer patients and society.

Although there is evidence that psychodrama and culture-based approaches are effective in addressing stigma and improving mental health, research that specifically examines the effectiveness of integrating the two in the context of cancer stigma is limited. This research offers a theoretical and practical contribution by exploring the effectiveness of Kuda Lumping culture-based psychodrama in reducing stigma against cancer patients in Indonesia. In addition to providing solutions to psychosocial problems faced by cancer patients, this study also enriched the literature on the application of culture-based therapy in the fields of psychology and public health.

Thus, this research has a strategic position in filling the gap in previous research. Through an innovative approach, this research is expected to provide a new perspective in efforts to manage social stigma against cancer patients and expand understanding of the role of cultural-based therapies in the context of public health.

2.   RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses Quasi-experimental design with design pre-test and post-test with control group (pre-test and post-test control group design). In this design, participants will be divided into two groups, namely the experimental group that will receive intervention in the form of Kuda Lumping culture-based psychodrama and the control group that does not receive intervention or receive alternative treatment. This design allows researchers to measure the changes that occur before and after the intervention, so that they can evaluate the effectiveness of the approach used. The selection of this design was based on the psychodrama theory developed by Jacob L. Moreno [42], which states that therapeutic processes can occur through three main elements, namely catharsis (emotional release), Insight (awareness), and role reversal (role-taking). Psychodrama provides individuals with the opportunity to play a specific role in social situations that represent conflict or emotional distress, thus allowing individuals to explore pent-up emotions and improve social relationships in their environment.

This research stage consists of five main stages, namely preparation, pre-test, implementation of intervention, post-test, and evaluation. In the preparation stage, the researcher will conduct a literature review to strengthen the theoretical and conceptual basis of psychodrama and cancer stigma. The researcher will also determine the research sample using purposive sampling techniques with certain criteria, such as cancer patients or individuals who are related to cancer patients, experience social stigma due to health conditions, and are willing to participate in full psychodrama sessions. In addition, the researcher will prepare research instruments in the form of a stigma scale (adapting the Stigma Scale for Chronic Illness), a questionnaire on social acceptance and emotional well-being, and a guide to the implementation of Kuda Lumping culture-based psychodrama. The next stage is the pre-test, in which participants from the experimental and control groups will fill out a questionnaire to measure their initial condition related to stigma and social acceptance before the intervention is implemented.

At the stage of implementing the intervention, the Kuda Lumping culture-based psychodrama will be carried out in six sessions with a duration of about 60 to 90 minutes per session. Each session will include three main stages based on Moreno's psychodrama theory, namely the warm-up stage, the action stage, and the sharing and integration stage. In the warm-up stage, the facilitator will ice-breaking and introduce the symbolism of the kuda lumping in the context of community strength and solidarity. In the action stage, participants will play roles developed from elements of Kuda Lumping, such as dance movements and horse symbols, to explore emotions and build social connections. The role reversal approach will be used to help participants understand the perspectives of the community and cancer patients. The session will end with a sharing and integration stage, where participants share feelings and insights gained from the session, while facilitators provide positive reinforcement and connect the results of reflection with social dynamics in society.

After all intervention sessions are completed, a post-test stage will be carried out to measure the changes that occur in participants. The same questionnaire as in the pre-test will be used to assess whether there is a significant change in stigma levels and social acceptance in the experimental group compared to the control group. Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test will be analyzed using the paired sample t-test and ANOVA to measure differences between groups and determine the significance of the results. Qualitative data from psychodrama sessions (narratives, interviews, and observations) will be analyzed using a grounded theoretical approach to identify thematic patterns and changes in social behavior. The results of the analysis will be confirmed with psychodrama theory and literature on health stigma and culture-based approaches.

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Theoretically, this research is based on the psychodrama approach developed by Moreno (1946) and the theory of social acceptance put forward by Link dan Phelan [43] about social stigma. This theory explains that stigma arises due to negative labeling of individuals or groups that are considered different from social norms. Kuda Lumping's culture-based psychodrama approach is expected to improve social dynamics by building empathy and acceptance through deep emotional experiences. Thus, this research not only makes a practical contribution in reducing stigma against cancer patients, but also enriches theoretical understanding of the effectiveness of culturally based therapies in the context of psychology and public health.
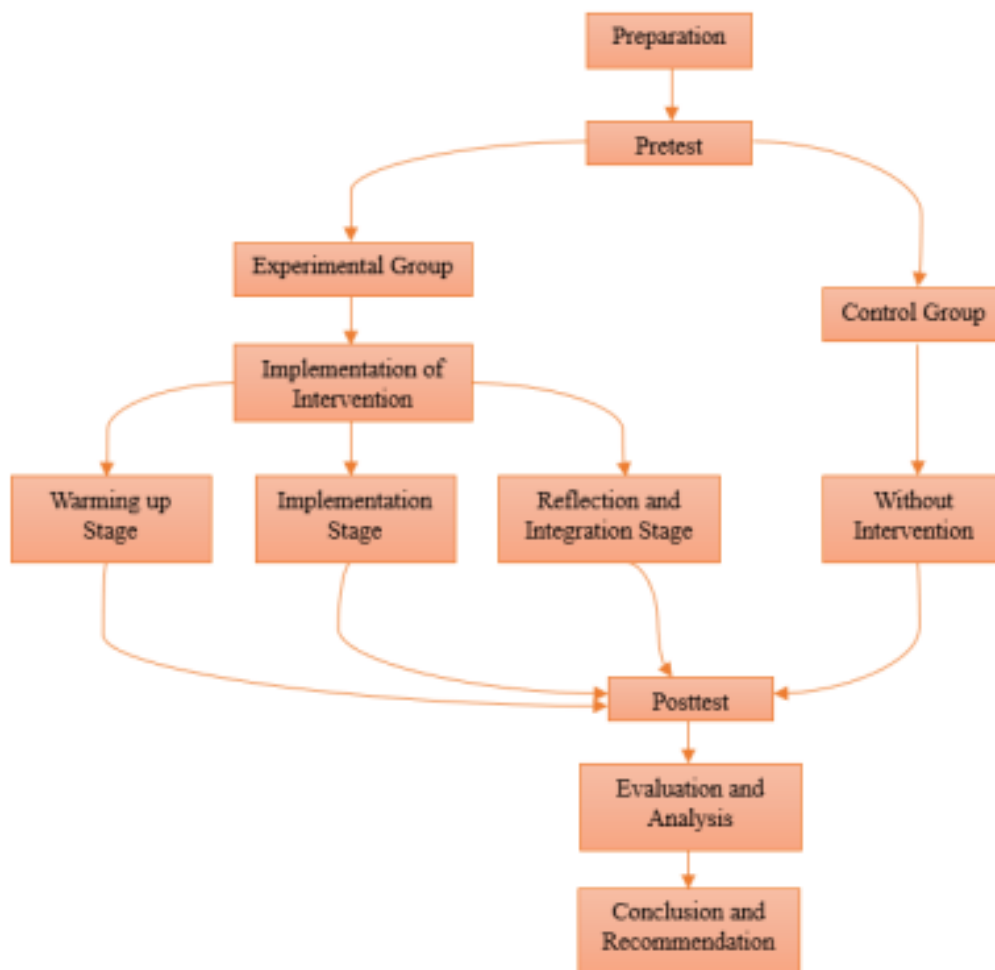

Figure 1. Research Process

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that there was a significant change in people's perception of cancer after participating in psychodrama sessions. Before the session, the majority of respondents (30%) considered cancer to be a very scary and difficult disease to cure. However, after the session, 45% of respondents stated that cancer can be overcome with proper treatment, and 35% stated that social support and fighting spirit play an important role in the healing process.

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Attitudes towards cancer patients have also experienced positive changes. Before the session, 20% of respondents felt anxious and afraid to interact with people with cancer, but after the session, 55% of respondents reported feeling more empathetic and wanting to provide support. The Lumping Horse Culture has been proven to be effective in increasing public understanding of cancer and reducing the stigma that exists. The Lumping Horse, which represents a symbol of resilience and courage, helps participants understand that cancer is a challenge that can be met with passion and support.

The results of this study show that psychodrama that elevates the culture of Kuda Lumping can be an innovative and effective approach in reducing the stigma against cancer in the community. The community's in-person involvement in role-playing based on local cultural values creates a safe space to share cancer-related stories, experiences, and feelings[55], [56], [57], [58]. Psychodrama as a method is not only used to uncover individual emotions, but also serves as a collective educational medium for the communities involved[24], [59]. This is in line with Moreno's basic concept of psychodrama, where emotional catharsis and social learning occur through dramatic roles and actions[42].

The main strength in this approach lies in the use of the Lumping Horse culture as a symbol of resistance to suffering and spiritual strength in the face of trials[20], [21]. In the context of Javanese culture, Kuda Lumping contains

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the meaning of endurance, spirit, and connection with supernatural forces[60]. By incorporating this element into psychodrama, participants, both patients, families, and the community can understand that cancer is not a curse or disgrace that must be hidden, but a life experience that can be faced together. This approach also deconstructs the understanding of society which is often influenced by myths, misinformation, and fear of cancer[61].

This research also shows that there is a paradigm shift in people's mindset after participating in psychodrama activities. Before the intervention, most participants showed an attitude of shunning, fear, or negative assessment of cancer patients. However, after participating in psychodrama, there was an increase in empathy, understanding, and even a willingness to provide social support to patients. This reflective process corresponds to the theory of symbolic interaction, in which meaning is formed and revised through social interaction[62], [63] Psychodrama that raises the real stories of cancer patients into a powerful interpersonal learning medium and touches social awareness.

However, this study also identified several challenges in the application of culture-based psychodrama methods. Among them is the initial resistance of the community to methods that are considered "foreign" or unfamiliar, as well as the limited understanding of cancer itself[58]. In addition, the process of internalizing the values presented in psychodrama requires time and continuous mentoring. However, through a participatory communication approach and strengthening the role of community leaders or traditional leaders, these obstacles can be overcome gradually. These findings remind that community-based interventions require cultural sensitivity, an inclusive approach, and patience in building social trust[64], [65], [66], [67].

In general, this study expands insights into the importance of cross-cultural and artistic approaches in social and mental health interventions. The Lumping Horse as a symbol of local culture not only serves as a traditional decoration, but can also be a tool for profound social and psychological transformation. Thus, the results of this study are not only relevant in the context of cancer stigma, but also open up opportunities to apply similar approaches in mental health issues, other chronic illnesses, or even in the process of trauma recovery. The integration of local culture into social intervention strategies is key to creating a contextual, sustainable, and more community-accepted approach[24], [59], [62], [63], [68]

This research presents a novelty in the approach of social and psychological intervention through the integration of psychodrama methods and local culture, especially the performing art of Kuda Lumping. So far, interventions against cancer stigma have been mostly carried out through medical, educational, or conventional counseling approaches. This research introduces a new model that combines the expressive power of psychodrama with the symbolic and spiritual values contained in traditional Indonesian culture[69], [70], [71], [72]. This has not been explored much in previous studies, both in the Indonesian context and globally.

Another uniqueness lies in the use of culture-based psychodrama as a social education tool that is able to bridge the gap between patients and society[73], [74]. The Lumping Horse is not only used as a symbol of performance, but is interpreted deeply as a form of representation of the struggle against disease and social stigma. This approach creates a strong emotional and cultural bridge, which is able to significantly change perceptions and increase people's empathy for people with cancer[75], [76], [77], [78], [79], [80].

In addition, this research also offers a participatory-community-based approach based on cultural arts that is able to embrace society as active subjects in the process of social change, not just as an object of intervention. By involving the community in the creative process, this research raises the potential for more natural, inclusive, and sustainable social transformation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the application of Kuda Lumping culture-based psychodrama is effective in reducing the stigma against cancer in the community. This approach has succeeded in increasing understanding and empathy for cancer patients and encouraging people to provide social support. Therefore, the application of culture-based psychodrama is recommended as a strategy in public health education programs.

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