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# Life Review Therapy in the Elderly with Alzheimer's Dementia: A Case Report

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**Abstract**---Aging is an inevitable process experienced by everyone and is closely associated with a decline in both physical and mental functions. Physically, the elderly are vulnerable to age-related diseases, including dementia. Life Review Therapy (LRT) emerges as a non-pharmacological intervention that assists the elderly in reflecting on and contemplating various aspects of their lives. The roots of this therapy are based on Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory and aim to enhance emotional and psychological well-being through the process of recalling and narrating life experiences. The steps of LRT involve discussions about successes, failures, and significant events in life, with the goal of rebuilding meaning and providing satisfaction. In cases of dementia, LRT can provide cognitive stimulation, allowing individuals to engage in thinking and remembering activities, potentially improving cognitive function. This therapy can also strengthen social relationships and offer opportunities for individuals to share their life stories with others.

**Keywords**---Alzheimer's dementia, elderly, life review therapy.

## Introduction

Aging is a natural process experienced by all humans. The elderly are closely associated with various health issues, both physical and mental. The aging process also affects the brain, potentially leading to mental health problems. Physically, aging is linked to age-related diseases commonly found in the elderly (Suminar & Diniari, 2023). The elderly also undergo life changes such as a decline in work productivity due to retirement, financial losses, loss of status or position, reduced activities, or the loss of loved ones, which can result in feelings of loneliness and helplessness. These changes can trigger mental health issues (Byeon, 2019).

Dementia is a syndrome resulting from brain disorders, chronic progressive, accompanied by multiple disturbances in higher cortical functions including memory, thinking, orientation, comprehension, calculation, learning, and judgment. It generally begins with a decline in emotional control, social behavior, or life motivation. Data from the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that more than 55 million people suffer from dementia, of which 60-70% is Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia in the elderly (WHO, 2023).

Life Review Therapy (LRT) is part of the therapeutic modalities for the elderly, directing them to narrate valuable experiences they have had throughout their life stages (Sharif et al., 2018). This therapy is a form of psychotherapy rooted in Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development theory of integrity versus despair. It aids the elderly in achieving a sense of integrity and avoiding feelings of despair. By attaining integrity, the elderly can find meaning in their lives and feel content with their life journey. Therefore, LRT is an appropriate therapeutic choice for addressing low self-esteem in the elderly, assisting them in recalling and integrating their life experiences in a positive manner (Narullita, 2018).

## Case Report

A 68-year-old female, housewife, widowed, completed junior high school. The evaluation took place in the psychiatric outpatient department. During the interview, the patient was unable to maintain eye contact, frequently lowered her head, and responded with only one or two-word answers in a very soft voice. She was admitted to the hospital due to sleep disturbances persisting for one month, worsening over the last week. On several occasions, she was observed talking to herself while pointing at something. When her desires are not met, she tends to become angry. She has a decreased appetite and will eat only when persuaded. Behavioral changes began two years ago after the death of her husband. Since then, she has frequently become confused, forgetting her way home and requiring assistance from others, and her physical condition has deteriorated, experiencing frequent breathlessness, though she remains able to engage in activities outside the home and maintain self-care. Recently, she has been observed talking and playing less with her grandchildren, becoming more withdrawn. Over the past few months, she has become easily irritated and displays anger when her wishes are not fulfilled. Over the last week, she has mostly remained seated in silence, often with her head lowered, or lying in her room. Family members assist with her activities and personal care. She has not expressed hunger or thirst. This is her first consultation with a psychiatrist. She had a history of stroke in 2013 but fully recovered. She was hospitalized a month ago due to weakness and refusal to eat. She has hearing and vision difficulties, though the onset is unknown, and struggles with chewing due to missing teeth. Currently, she resides with her two daughters (Sosa-Ortiz et al., 2012; Jellinger et al., 1990; Zuliani et al., 2007; Lestari et al., 2016).

Vital signs examination revealed a blood pressure of 120/80 mmHg, heart rate of 78 beats per minute, respiratory rate of 18 breaths per minute, body temperature of 37.0°C, and oxygen saturation (SpO<sub>2</sub>) of 99%. Psychiatric status examination with gloomy appearance, limited verbal and visual contact. The patient's consciousness was clear. Mood and affect could not be assessed. Thought processes were indeterminate; thought flow was slowed, poor speech and poor ideation. Auditory and visual hallucinations were suspected. Instinctual drives found type late insomnia, hypobulia, and history of raptus. The patient remained calm during the examination. Psychometric assessment using the Barthel Activities of Daily Living (ADL) scale showed a total score of 4 (indicating complete dependence), and the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) score was 40 (indicating some impairment in relation to reality and communication). The patient was diagnosed with late-onset Alzheimer's disease (F03.1). The treatment prescribed includes oral Risperidone 0.5 mg once daily and life review therapy.

## Discussion

The patient underwent direct non-pharmacological intervention, namely Life Review Therapy (LRT). The patient was encouraged to recall the times when she raised her children and was asked to share strategies for successfully raising four children. Initially reluctant to speak, responding only with brief, soft-spoken words, the patient gradually became more animated in her storytelling. She recounted many events from the past, especially the challenges of raising children with different personalities. There was a noticeable shift in her behavior. She began holding her head higher and speaking more clearly while discussing her journey of raising her children (Swardfager et al., 2010; Profenno et al., 2010; Braak & Braak, 1997; Ahmad et al., 2021). During one session, she expressed her sadness about facing loneliness, and feeling isolated at home when her children were away at work. On one hand, she didn't want them to leave due to fear, but on the other, she understood their need to work and support the family. She grappled with accepting her solitude and suppressing her fears. The patient was anxious about confronting death by herself, especially considering her age and medical conditions. She frequently reported hallucinations of malicious figures attempting to pull her out, especially when in her room. Often waking up in fear, she became hesitant to sleep, fearing the ominous figures pulling her from her bed. Despite sharing these experiences with her children, they struggled to comprehend the depth of her feelings and experiences (Román, 2002; Schoenmakers et al., 2010; Mayeux et al., 2001; Campbell et al., 1988).

LRT is a therapeutic modality used as an adjunctive management for the elderly with dementia in Alzheimer's disease. Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of LRT on the elderly. A study by Nurulita in 2018 found that 60% of elderly individuals with moderate depression, after undergoing LRT, all showed a reduction in depression levels to normal, accompanied by a significant improvement in self-esteem (Nurullita, 2018). In 1963, Dr. Robert Butler introduced the concept of LRT, providing new insights into memories and reflections on past life experiences. Life Review not only fosters awareness of one's life journey but also enhances the ability to accept one's existence and the impending reality of death. Butler believed that individuals could resolve past conflicts, find meaning in life, and face their remaining days with greater peace (Haber, 2006). By evaluating life accomplishments,

individuals can perceive them as sources of wisdom or confront the end of life with regrets and other negative emotions. Life Review plays a crucial role in facilitating positive growth and adjustment in old age, aiding individuals in finding purpose in their life journey and attaining peace in facing the future (Emilyani & Dramawan, 2019).

In the LRT technique, the individual's forgotten experiences that have the potential to be revealed can encompass both negative and positive experiences. Negative experiences can be analyzed rationally, while positive ones are discussed to grow a sense of purpose in the patient (Moghadam & Zare, 2018). The aim is to achieve integrity and enhance the quality of life (Rohmawati et al., 2016). Haight and Webster discussed the structure, evaluation, generality, and individuality within the therapy process. This therapeutic model is conducted for 2 hours per week over 8 sessions. The method consists of five separate parts, each related to significant life events such as loss, primary activities, descriptions, relationships with influential individuals, and developmental experiences from childhood to old age. Research by Emilyani and Dramawan, which assessed the effectiveness of LRT on elderly cognitive changes, involved participants receiving treatment in four sessions: 1) discussing childhood experiences, 2) discussing teenage experiences, 3) discussing adult experiences, and 4) discussing experiences from advanced age. They concluded that after undergoing LRT, there was an improvement in cognitive ability levels (Emilyani & Dramawan, 2019).

Individuals undergoing LRT are encouraged to reflect on their lives and share stories from the past. They are prompted to revisit specific periods, such as childhood, parenthood, or other significant life stages. Additionally, discussions can encompass particular topics like education, music, achievements, or pivotal moments in life (Wardhani et al., 2020). Individuals may bring items that remind them of certain life periods, such as family photos, music recordings, or any object from the past that aids in reminiscing. This technique also facilitates deeper exploration. After individuals share and elaborate on memories, therapy focuses on these recollections, helping individuals find meaning or significance in them. This process can have a positive impact, evoking joy and aiding in the resolution of unresolved conflicts, thus fostering acceptance and closure (Rohmawati et al., 2016). Several methods are used in LRT (Sharif et al., 2018):

- 1) Memorabilia: Using physical objects like letters, diaries, or photos. This method can evoke mixed emotions, as some individuals might not be accustomed to considering themselves in their current context, still identifying with a younger version of themselves. By gathering mementos, individuals become aware of unresolved issues they can address and stimulate memories of both good and bad times.
- 2) Reunion: Providing an opportunity for reflection and understanding oneself in the context of relationships and shared experiences with loved ones. Reunions can elicit various emotions such as joy, celebration, and sorrow over lost memories. Gathering with others who share similar past experiences helps individuals recognize their place in the life cycle and prompts reflections on their life journey.
- 3) Pilgrimage: Revisiting specific places can trigger a range of mixed emotions, especially if associated with deep emotional experiences like joy. Visiting these historical sites often brings peace, allowing individuals to soak in and celebrate memories linked to that location.
- 4) Family Tree: Creating a family lineage can be beneficial in establishing and recognizing one's position in family history. This method also helps address the fear of death as family lineage serves as a valuable reminder of loved ones and deceased family members.
- 5) Preserving Ethnic Identity: Often, older individuals may lose or forget their ethnic identity. Reviving these aspects of their identity can have both personal and social value, contributing to the restructuring of an individual's identity.

LRT makes individuals more grounded in the reality of life and helps activate long-term memory through recalling events from their past up to the present. Through this technique, individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves and develop a desire to enhance their quality of life. LRT is beneficial in reducing depression and enhancing self-confidence, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. The benefits of LRT (Rohmawati et al., 2016):

- 1) Enhancing Quality of Life: Recollection serves as a bridge between the past and the present. Narrating life stories can boost self-esteem, reduce depression, and invigorate a zest for exploring the remaining life.
- 2) Acceptance: Reviewing past experiences can induce catharsis, allowing for reflection and overcoming end-of-life despair.

- 3) Conflict Resolution: Reflecting on significant life experiences can assist in resolving conflicts. Revisiting pivotal life events aids in conflict resolution as it requires a retrospective review before moving forward. Individuals cannot progress if there are lingering conflicts and resentments from the past.
- 4) Legacy Transfer: Recordings from each life review therapy session (with consent) can provide deeper insights to family and friends. They can learn many lessons from these experiences, ensuring that such valuable information isn't lost upon the individual's passing.
- 5) Integrated Peace: LRT brings meaning to life, reshapes perceptions about death, and involves the family to enhance communication and life quality.
- 6) Ego Integrity / Self-Coherence: A strong ego integrity helps maintain identity and reduces anxiety. LRT fosters positive memories, re-evaluates life events, and reconstructs life narratives to enhance life quality.
- 7) LRT is not suitable for individuals with severe or recurring trauma as it may evoke negative experiences and fail to provide peace and tranquillity (Sharif et al., 2018).

## Conclusion

The elderly are closely associated with changes in physical and psychological functions. The elderly are susceptible to age-related diseases, including dementia, which results in disturbances in memory, behavior, and mood. Life Review Therapy (LRT) is a therapeutic modality used as an adjunctive management for the elderly experiencing dementia in Alzheimer's disease. This therapy is based on Erik Erikson's social development theory in the stage of integrity versus despair, aiming to enhance integrity and avoid despair. Once integrity is achieved, individuals can reap the benefits from various earlier stages and lead a more meaningful life.

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