

NURSING CARE FOR CHILDREN THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF AUDIOVISUAL THERAPY: WATCHING CARTOON FILMS TO REDUCE ANXIETY LEVELS DURING HOSPITALIZATION AT ARIFIN ACHMAD HOSPITAL

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Abstract

Anxiety is one of the most common emotional reactions in children, particularly among preschoolers (ages 3–6), when undergoing hospitalization. Hospitalization at this age often exposes children to an unfamiliar hospital environment and frightening medical procedures, which may affect their comfort and recovery process. This study aimed to determine the effect of audiovisual therapy by watching cartoon films on anxiety levels in hospitalized children at Arifin Achmad General Hospital, Pekanbaru. The research design used was an evidence-based nursing case study involving two preschool-aged children (3–6 years) experiencing mild to moderate anxiety. The intervention was conducted for two consecutive days, 15 minutes each session, using colorful, cheerful, and simple cartoon films. Anxiety levels were measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) before and after the intervention. The results showed a significant decrease in anxiety levels after the audiovisual therapy. The first patient's HARS score decreased from 18 to 10 (mild anxiety category), and the second patient's score decreased from 15 to 8 (mild anxiety category). Positive behavioral changes were also observed, including being more relaxed, not crying, and showing better cooperation during medical procedures. It can be concluded that audiovisual therapy through watching cartoons is effective in reducing anxiety levels among preschool children undergoing hospitalization. This intervention is a simple, enjoyable, safe, and practical non-pharmacological method that can be applied in pediatric nursing practice to enhance comfort and support Evidence-Based Nursing Practice (EBNP).

Keywords: Anxiety; Audiovisual Therapy; Cartoon Films; Hospitalization; Preschool Children

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is one of the most common emotional reactions experienced by children, especially those in the preschool age group (3–6 years), when undergoing hospitalization (Fatmawati et al., 2020). Hospitalization is a process in which a child is admitted to a hospital due to certain health conditions that require medical supervision. For children, the experience of being hospitalized is not merely a physical treatment process, but also a psychologically stressful experience (Susanti et al., 2023).

Hospitalization exposes children to a variety of unpleasant situations, such as separation from parents, being in an unfamiliar environment filled with medical equipment, restrictions on play activities, and undergoing medical procedures that may cause pain (Lameky & Parinussa, 2025).

This condition often leads children to experience stress, fear, and anxiety. Preschool-aged children do not yet possess sufficient cognitive maturity to understand the reason for their hospitalization; therefore, they tend to perceive illness and hospitalization as punishment for

something they did wrong (Oktamarina et al., 2022). As a result, children may cry easily, become irritable, refuse to eat, have difficulty sleeping, resist medical procedures, or even develop long-term psychological trauma. Thus, a child's anxiety during hospitalization not only affects their emotional state but can also hinder the healing and care process (Ekasaputri & Arniyanti, 2022).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), approximately 5 million preschool children worldwide experience anxiety during hospitalization, particularly due to surgical and medical procedures (Padila et al., 2020). In Indonesia, it is recorded that 2.8% or around 82,666 children experience anxiety during inpatient care (Pramudita & Maryatun, 2023). The National Health Survey also reported that 30.82% of children aged 0–17 years experience anxiety during hospital treatment. In Riau Province, medical record data from Arifin Achmad General Hospital in 2025 indicated that 1,200 children underwent hospitalization in 2024, consisting of 520 children aged 2–4 years and 620 children aged 5–14 years (Jesika et al., 2025). These data show that anxiety among hospitalized children remains a serious issue that requires attention in nursing care.

Hospitalization in children involves various procedures and activities that can trigger fear, such as routine physical examinations involving contact with unfamiliar people, intravenous line insertion, blood draws, medication administration through injections, and other medical procedures (Pulungan et al., 2022). Moreover, children must adapt to the hospital environment — the inpatient room, the smell of medicines, the sounds of medical devices, and interactions with multiple unfamiliar healthcare workers. Not infrequently, children feel a loss of control over themselves because their activities are regulated entirely by adults. All these factors intensify anxiety and make the hospitalization experience even more distressing for children (Rahmnia et al., 2024).

In pediatric nursing practice, various strategies have been developed to help reduce anxiety. Although pharmacological interventions are available, their use is limited due to potential side effects. Therefore, non-pharmacological methods are more often chosen because they are safe, simple, and have minimal risk (Ramdhanie et al., 2024). Several non-pharmacological interventions proven effective include play therapy, music therapy, storytelling or reading therapy, simple relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, blowing balloons or soap bubbles, and touch therapy such as hugging or gentle stroking from parents to increase comfort and a sense of security (Lestari et al., 2025).

Among these methods, audiovisual therapy through cartoon films is one of the most promising interventions. This method works by diverting the child's attention away from fear and anxiety related to hospitalization toward entertaining, funny, and familiar visual stimuli (Febriani & Juwariyah, 2023). Cartoon films are highly appealing to preschoolers because they are colorful, feature funny characters, and have simple storylines. Such shows can evoke positive emotions, promote relaxation, and reduce physiological anxiety responses such as increased heart rate, crying, or restlessness. Moreover, audiovisual therapy is easy to apply in pediatric wards, requires minimal equipment, and is relatively inexpensive (Sakti et al., 2022). However, at Arifin Achmad General Hospital, this audiovisual intervention has not yet been integrated into the standard pediatric nursing care procedures. As a result, opportunities to enhance children's comfort and the quality of care during hospitalization have not been fully utilized. Therefore, it is important to examine the effectiveness of audiovisual therapy using cartoon films in reducing children's anxiety levels. Through this scientific work titled "Pediatric Nursing Care Through the Application of Audiovisual Therapy: Watching Cartoon Films to Reduce Anxiety During Hospitalization at Arifin Achmad Hospital", it is expected

that strong evidence will be obtained to serve as a foundation for the development of non-pharmacological, evidence-based nursing practices in pediatric care.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an evidence-based nursing case study design aimed at identifying the application of audiovisual therapy through watching cartoons to reduce anxiety levels among hospitalized children. The research was conducted in the Anggrek Ward of Arifin Achmad General Hospital, Pekanbaru, Riau, from October 16–17, 2025.

The study subjects were two preschool-aged children (3–6 years old) who experienced anxiety during hospitalization. Subject selection was carried out using purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria: children who had been hospitalized for at least two days, were able to communicate verbally, and showed symptoms of mild to moderate anxiety.

The intervention provided was audiovisual therapy using cartoon films, administered over two consecutive days, with each session lasting 15 minutes. The films were selected according to age appropriateness and featured positive, humorous, and educational content to create a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere. The therapy sessions were conducted in the children's playroom in a comfortable environment and were accompanied by a parent or caregiver.

Anxiety levels were measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) before and after the intervention. Observation sheets were used to record physiological and behavioral changes in the children during and after therapy. Data were analyzed descriptively by comparing pre- and post-intervention anxiety scores for each subject.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This study was conducted in the Anggrek Ward of Arifin Achmad General Hospital, Pekanbaru, in October 2025, involving two preschool-aged children (3–6 years old) who experienced anxiety during hospitalization. The two respondents had different characteristics; however, both exhibited symptoms of mild to moderate anxiety before the intervention was administered.

Before the audiovisual therapy was provided, anxiety levels were measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS). The results showed that Patient 1 had a score of 18 (moderate anxiety category), while Patient 2 had a score of 15 (moderate anxiety category). The intervention was carried out for two consecutive days, with each session lasting 15 minutes, using children's cartoon films that were funny, brightly colored, and had simple storylines. During the therapy process, both children exhibited positive behavioral changes, such as becoming calmer, not crying, smiling, and showing interest in following the storyline of the film.

After the audiovisual therapy was administered, anxiety levels were re-measured using the same instrument. The results showed a decrease in anxiety levels in both patients. Patient 1's HARS score decreased from 18 to 10 (mild anxiety category), and Patient 2's score decreased from 15 to 8 (mild anxiety category).

Table 1. Comparison of HARS Scores Before and After Intervention

No	Child Initials	Age (years)	Before Score	After Score	Score Difference	Final Category
1	A (Patient 1)	5	18	10	8	Mild
2	B (Patient 2)	4	15	8	7	Mild

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Overall, the results of the study showed that audiovisual therapy using cartoon films was effective in reducing anxiety levels of preschoolers undergoing hospitalization. This intervention has been shown to be able to create a pleasant atmosphere, distract children from fear, and increase comfort during hospitalization.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that audiovisual therapy through watching cartoons is effective in reducing anxiety levels among preschool children hospitalized in the pediatric ward. This was demonstrated by the decrease in anxiety scores of both patients after two consecutive days of intervention. The first patient's score decreased from 18 to 10, while the second patient's score decreased from 15 to 8 — both categorized as mild anxiety.

This reduction in anxiety levels shows that audiovisual therapy provides a relaxing effect and helps alleviate the psychological stress experienced by children during hospitalization. Cartoon films that are humorous, brightly colored, and have simple storylines can evoke positive emotional responses such as happiness and calmness. According to Febriani and Juwariyah (2023), audiovisual media work by diverting a child's attention away from fear of the hospital environment toward an enjoyable experience, thereby stabilizing the autonomic nervous system and normalizing physiological indicators such as heart rate and respiration.

These findings are consistent with the study by Sakti et al. (2022), which stated that the use of cartoon films as a therapeutic medium can reduce anxiety in children undergoing invasive procedures because it diverts their focus away from pain and frightening medical interventions. In addition, Ramdhanie et al. (2024) found that non-pharmacological interventions such as audiovisual therapy are safer and easier to apply than pharmacological methods, as they produce no side effects and can be performed in inpatient rooms with minimal facilities.

From a psychological perspective, preschool children have limited cognitive abilities and tend to perceive the world through imagination. Colorful and humorous cartoon characters can stimulate curiosity and imagination while creating a sense of comfort and security. This aligns with Lestari et al. (2025), who emphasized that play-based therapy and entertainment activities can effectively reduce stress levels and enhance children's adaptation to the hospital environment.

In addition to providing positive effects on children, the application of audiovisual therapy also benefits nurses and parents. Calmer children tend to be more cooperative during medical procedures, making the care process more effective and efficient. Thus, audiovisual cartoon therapy can be utilized as an evidence-based, non-pharmacological intervention to reduce anxiety in hospitalized children.

However, this study has certain limitations, including the small number of subjects and the short duration of implementation. Therefore, further research with a larger sample size and

longer intervention period is recommended to strengthen the evidence supporting the effectiveness of this therapy.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study demonstrate that audiovisual therapy through watching cartoon films is effective in reducing anxiety levels among preschool children hospitalized at Arifin Achmad General Hospital, Pekanbaru. After two consecutive days of intervention, each lasting 15 minutes, both patients showed a decrease in anxiety levels as measured by the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS). The first patient's score decreased from 18 to 10, and the second patient's score decreased from 15 to 8, indicating a transition from moderate to mild anxiety. Audiovisual therapy works by diverting children's attention away from fear of the hospital environment and medical procedures toward cheerful and colorful visual experiences, thereby promoting a sense of calmness and comfort. This intervention also helps improve children's cooperation during treatment and reduces resistance to simple medical procedures.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that audiovisual therapy through cartoon films is a simple, enjoyable, safe, and effective non-pharmacological intervention to reduce anxiety in hospitalized children. Therefore, this intervention is recommended for implementation in pediatric nursing practice as part of Evidence-Based Nursing Practice (EBNP) to enhance comfort and improve the quality of nursing care in pediatric inpatient settings.

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