


# Application of Individual Counseling with Systematic Desentization Techniques to Overcome Ailurophobia


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ABSTRACT	
<p><b>ARTICLE INFO:</b> Received July 08, 2024</p> <p>Revised August 08, 2024</p> <p>Accepted September 28, 2024</p> <p><b>KEYWORDS:</b> Ailurophobia, Counseling, Systematic Desentization</p>	<p>This research contains problems related to: fear or anxiety about Ailurophobia, excessive feelings when in direct contact with cats in client "T", and how to apply individual counseling using systematic desensitization techniques to overcome Ailurophobia so that client "T" gets counseling services in order to solve the problem Client "T" against Ailurophobia. This type of research is field research, the approach used is a qualitative approach case study design, and according to Creswell, it is a complex picture, examining words, detailed reports from the respondents' views, and conducting studies in natural situations. The data collection techniques used were observation and interviews. While data analysis techniques consist of pattern matching and time series analysis. The result of the research obtained were that client "T" was experiencing Ailurophobia with excessive fear and anxiety regarding Systematic Desentization. Client "T" had improved regarding Ailurophobia. The factor causing Ailurophobia in client "T" is a feeling of trauma at elementary school (SD) level with a cat, such as bites and scratches received.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Humans always strive to live a calmer life and seek a sense of comfort (Rasoal et al., 2009). Every human being has a different view of responses in facing life's problems (Orloff, 2017). All fear and anxiety are substantial factors in every human being (Xie et al., 2021). There are several factors that are often forgotten because they are too focused on what is called success. Hopes and dreams for the future experience fear and anxiety about different objects and depend on ambition, ability and desire within oneself (Peterson, 2000).

Fear is one of the emotions that every individual has (Mortazavi et al., 2020). Feelings of fear in individuals arise when the individual sees something that makes him afraid and could be dangerous from the thing he is facing so that the individual can act more carefully. Feelings of fear are closely related to feelings of anxiety. Fear is a feeling and is an anxious response to a threat (Putera et al., 2020). And excessive fear experienced by someone in psychology is known as a phobia. Phobia or otherwise known in Greek, namely phobos, is a feeling of excessive fear that exists in a person which is felt continuously towards an object that is irrational in nature (Boyd et al., 1990).

Phobia is an excessive fear of something that can be caused by several factors (Breuninger et al., 2019). The anxiety that every individual often feels about something irrational makes a person unable to carry out various activities (Zimmer-Gembeck & Pronk, 2012). Martin & Pear stated that irrational, excessive and intense feelings of anxiety which often make individuals unable to carry out various activities are called phobias. Smith also views a phobia as a feeling of intense anxiety that causes actual harm (Zhou et al., 2020).

There is one type of anxiety and fear, namely Ailurophobia is a type of specific phobia disorder that involves an irrational (irrational thinking) and excessive (unproportional) fear of cats (Yilmaz et

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al., 2023). People who suffer from Ailurophobia cats really scare them. Based on observations made, many people do not know much about Ailurophobia (Gul, 2022). Due to the lack of public knowledge, many people do not understand whether they are suffering from Ailurophobia or not (Khaleghi et al., 2024). The term ailurophobia comes from the Greek word which means excessive fear of cats. But ailurophobia is a medium term for fear of cats, although it is very challenging to understand this fear of cats for cat lovers, but it is a very serious problem for people who suffer from this fear (London, 1952). Ailurophobia is reflected as a type of anxiety disorder and in people who suffer from it an excessive, crazy and tenacious fear of cats. The fear caused by cat phobia is "specific" and varies from person to person. For example, screaming, crying, and avoiding situations that they think will cause fear, for example avoiding places where cats are (Syahputra et al., 2023).

Therefore, client "T" has anxiety or fear of cats. Client "T" thinks that cats give a higher sense of fear and according to client "T" cats are ridiculous animals because there are some cats that have little fur so that when touched, client "T" feels scared. Client "T" had a bad experience with cats, because when he was in grade 5 of elementary school, client "T" was scratched by a cat, causing an infection/injury. Therefore, client "T" tried to get away but the cat always approached him. And until now, client "T" feels afraid and anxious about cats, afraid when he sees a cat, so that when a cat approaches, the client feels anxious, nervous, panics and screams and runs to a place where there are no cats (Prabowo & Anita, 2024).

An effort that will be made to overcome cat phobia is through individual counseling using systematic desensitization techniques. Individual counseling is a counseling service provided by a counselor for a client in order to reduce problems (Trimble, 2009). The basis of the systematic desensitization (SD) technique is classical conditioning counterconditioning, and in particular, a concept that has been previously looked at called reciprocal inhibition. According to & Reichenberg, two conflicting responses cannot occur simultaneously (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). It is impossible to be afraid and calm at the same time (Pagone & Choe, 2023).

The desensitization technique is a method aimed at altering behavior by integrating various strategies, which include reflecting on certain thoughts, achieving relaxation, and visualizing scenarios (Sukmawati et al., 2023). The underlying assumption of systematic desensitization in addressing anxiety is that stimuli, particularly those that trigger anxiety, can be diminished and managed when paired with a counteracting (opposite) response to that anxiety (Yilmaz et al., 2023).

The urgency of addressing ailurophobia, or the irrational fear of cats, lies in its significant impact on the daily lives of those affected. People who suffer from this specific phobia often experience heightened anxiety, panic, and avoidance behavior when encountering cats or environments where cats may be present. This can severely limit their ability to engage in routine activities, interact with others, or even visit common places like parks or homes with pets. Without proper intervention, these individuals may continue to experience psychological distress, social isolation, and diminished quality of life. Recognizing and treating phobias like ailurophobia is therefore crucial to improving mental health and ensuring individuals can participate fully in everyday life without fear (Westberg et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the lack of public knowledge about ailurophobia contributes to its urgency as a mental health issue (Tesfaye et al., 2021). Many people are unaware that this phobia even exists or do not recognize the seriousness of the problem, which can prevent those affected from seeking help. This lack of awareness also leads to misunderstanding or trivialization of the fear by others, further complicating the experiences of those suffering from ailurophobia (Davis et al., 2021). By raising awareness and promoting effective treatment methods, such as individual counseling and systematic desensitization techniques, mental health professionals can help individuals manage and overcome this phobia, ultimately fostering a more supportive and informed community.

Based on the introduction above regarding individual counseling using systematic desensitization (SD) techniques to overcome Ailurophobia. So researchers are interested in

examining the application of individual counseling using the systematic desensitization (SD) technique to overcome ailurophobia (case study on "T" clients, Kemuning subdistrict, Palembang).

### **Rationale of the Study**

Ailurophobia, the irrational fear of cats, significantly impacts the lives of those who suffer from it, often causing severe anxiety, panic, and avoidance behaviors in situations involving cats (Gul, 2022). This can limit their ability to participate in routine activities, visit common places, or engage in social interactions where cats may be present, leading to potential isolation and distress. Without proper intervention, these individuals continue to face psychological challenges that diminish their quality of life (Tsai et al., 2020). Addressing this phobia is crucial to improving mental health outcomes, as many people are unaware of its existence or severity, resulting in a lack of support and understanding (Wei et al., 2017). Raising awareness and utilizing effective treatment strategies, such as individual counseling and systematic, can help individuals manage and overcome their fear, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for those affected (Pagone & Choe, 2023).

### **Purpose of the Study**

To Examine the effectiveness of systematic desensitization techniques in reducing the irrational fear and anxiety associated with ailurophobia. Through individual counseling sessions, the study aims to assess how gradual exposure to the feared stimulus, combined with relaxation techniques, can help clients like "T" overcome their phobia of cats. Additionally, the study seeks to increase awareness of ailurophobia as a legitimate mental health issue, providing insights into its psychological impact and offering practical interventions to help individuals manage their fears. Ultimately, this research aims to improve therapeutic approaches for phobias and contribute to the overall well-being of individuals suffering from ailurophobia.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This research uses a qualitative approach with field research. According to Creswell, qualitative research involves developing a complex picture, examining words, providing detailed reports from respondents' views, and conducting studies in natural settings. The research method adopted in this study is a case study design, which, according to Winkel, is defined as a method to better understand an individual's circumstances and development in order to help them improve their further growth.

### **Research Subject**

The subject of this study is Client "T", an individual who suffers from ailurophobia, an irrational fear of cats. Client "T" was selected based on their severe anxiety and fear responses when encountering cats, which significantly impact their daily life. The client's phobia stems from a traumatic childhood experience involving a cat scratch that led to an injury. This fear has persisted into adulthood, causing the client to exhibit panic, nervousness, and avoidance behaviors when near cats. The study focuses on understanding Client "T's" experiences and responses, aiming to reduce their ailurophobia through counseling and systematic desensitization techniques.

### **Procedure**

The research is conducted in a natural setting, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. Data collection involves qualitative methods such as observations, interviews, and document studies. The case study approach is employed to deeply investigate the condition of a client with ailurophobia, capturing the nuances of their experiences through direct interaction and observation.

## Measures

Data is collected through three main techniques: observation, which involves watching and recording the client's behavior in situations involving cats; interviews, where the client shares their personal experiences and emotions related to their phobia; and documentation, including medical or psychological reports related to the client's phobia and progress during therapy. These qualitative measures allow the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of the client's condition.

## Data Analysis

Data is analyzed inductively, constructing theories from the ground up, which aligns with the grounded theory approach. The analysis is descriptive, providing detailed narratives of the client's experiences. Throughout the study, a greater emphasis is placed on the process rather than the results. The data is validated through methods such as triangulation and peer checking to ensure accuracy and reliability. Temporary designs are utilized, meaning the research framework can be adjusted based on findings in the field. Ultimately, the study's findings are used as a data source for developing further insights into the treatment of ailurophobia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### *Preview Subject*

Client "T" is a female teenager, this client comes from Tanjung Enim sub-district and grew up in Lawang Kidul village. In 2020, client "T" entered college at Raden Fatah State Islamic University, Palembang. Client "T" was born in Tanjung Enim, Lawang Kidul sub-district on February 7 2003. Client "T" is someone who previously thought cats were normal and did not feel afraid, anxious and tense when they saw cats, but after the incident experienced by client "T" "Since he was in elementary school, he started to feel uncomfortable and anxious about things related to cats. Even when he heard about cats, client "T" felt uncomfortable and afraid.

Client "T" has developed ailurophobia, an irrational and excessive fear of cats, which originated from a traumatic experience in elementary school when she was scratched by a cat. Since that incident, Client "T" has experienced persistent anxiety and fear around cats, leading to avoidance behaviors, such as running away or panicking when she encounters them. Her fear has intensified to the point where even hearing about cats triggers feelings of discomfort and dread. This phobia disrupts her daily life, creating a constant sense of unease in environments where cats may be present, significantly affecting her emotional well-being and social interactions.

#### *Emotional Aspect*

The following are the results of the researcher's interviews and observations with client "T" which were carried out on February 21-24 as follows from the Emotional Aspect:

"...Yes, I wasn't afraid of cats before, but I don't really like cats. Before the stressful incident, I used to think cats were normal. After the trauma of being scratched by a cat and causing an infection, I now feel nervous when I see cats. This made me feel traumatized and felt tense..."

Based on the interview above, it explains that client "T"'s emotions change. This shows that client "T" experienced a traumatic past that made him feel afraid of cats when he saw cats. The following are the results of the researcher's interview with client "T" on cognitive aspects.

"...When I see a cat I don't think about anything else because I only think that the cat will approach me, and my mind is always anxious..."

Based on the interview above, it explains that client "T" still feels afraid and trembles when he sees a cat and even hears the cat's voice. Client "T" feels that the client cannot think long and has difficulty concentrating. Furthermore, the results of the researcher's interview with client "T" from the physiological aspect.

"...Yes, when I see a cat my heart feels pounding, especially when approached by a cat..."

Based on the interview above, it is clear that client "T" has symptoms of ailurophobia. Because client "T" had a traumatic past experience of being scratched by a cat which caused an infection. This is based on the results of field observations carried out by researchers, the picture of ailurophobia experienced by client "T" is experiencing an unreasonable and excessive fear of cats, because it is caused by the presence and anticipation of cats.

Client "T" exhibited noticeable emotional changes following the traumatic experience of being scratched by a cat, which resulted in an infection. Prior to the incident, Client "T" had no significant emotional response to cats, regarding them as ordinary animals. However, the trauma has since triggered feelings of anxiety and nervousness whenever she encounters a cat. In interviews, Client "T" expressed that she now feels consistently tense and emotionally unsettled in the presence of cats, indicating a clear emotional shift from indifference to fear. This emotional response stems from the trauma, leading to a lasting sense of unease and heightened emotional sensitivity whenever cats are nearby. Furthermore, the emotional impact of this phobia extends beyond mere fear. The traumatic memory of being scratched has evolved into a deep-seated emotional response that includes panic and tension, which surfaces even when Client "T" hears about or sees images of cats. This fear-based emotional reaction disrupts her sense of calm, making her feel vulnerable and agitated. The fear is not only present during actual encounters with cats but is triggered by the mere thought of them, showing the significant and ongoing emotional toll ailurophobia has on Client "T's" daily life and overall emotional well-being.

### ***Counseling with Systematic Desensitization***

The systematic desensitization technique is a behavioral therapy approach designed to help individuals gradually confront and overcome their phobias through a process of exposure and relaxation. This technique is grounded in classical conditioning, where the goal is to replace the fear response with a more adaptive response, such as relaxation. The process typically involves three main steps: teaching the client relaxation techniques, creating a hierarchy of fear-inducing stimuli related to the phobia, and gradually exposing the client to these stimuli while they practice relaxation. This method allows clients to face their fears in a controlled and supportive environment, enabling them to build confidence and reduce their anxiety over time.

In the case of Client "T," the implementation of systematic desensitization led to significant improvements in her emotional, cognitive, and physiological reactions to cats. During the counseling sessions, Client "T" learned relaxation techniques to manage her anxiety when faced with cats. As she progressed through her fear hierarchy from merely thinking about cats to being near them she reported decreased levels of tension and fear. Post-counseling interviews revealed that she no longer experiences negative thoughts about cats and can now maintain a sense of calm when encountering them. This transformation highlights the effectiveness of systematic desensitization in helping individuals like Client "T" overcome their phobias and regain control over their emotional responses.

"...At first, I was really scared, but now I feel much more relaxed around cats..." However, she also recounted her initial struggles, saying, "...When I

see a cat, my heart races, and I feel like I can't breathe. I used to scream and run away..."

After carrying out the individual counseling process using the systematic desensitization technique. Client "T" already feels better than the previous aspects, there are three aspects. Aspects of Emotional Reactions, Cognitive Reactions, and Physiological Reactions. The following are the results of the individual counseling process interview using the systematic desensitization technique, on the emotional aspect of client "T", revealing.

"...Thank God, I no longer feel tense when I see cats and I have started to be brave when I am close to cats and my fear has decreased..."

The following are the results of researchers with client "T" from the cognitive aspect.

"...No, I don't feel that way and I don't think negatively about cats anymore. I can think positively now. And what's more, I can now make decisions when I see a cat and I feel calm and no longer anxious..."

Next, the researcher interviewed client "T" from the physiological aspect.

"...Thank God. I don't feel nervous anymore if a cat approaches me. "With my feelings now, I feel better when I see the cat, I don't feel shaking anymore..."

Post-counseling interviews revealed that she no longer experiences negative thoughts about cats and can now maintain a sense of calm when encountering them. In her own words, she expressed, "I don't feel nervous anymore if a cat approaches me. I feel better when I see the cat; I don't feel shaking anymore." This transformation highlights the effectiveness of systematic desensitization in helping individuals like Client "T" overcome their phobias and regain control over their emotional responses.

## **Discussion**

The description of ailurophobia in client "T" is specific ailurophobia which assumes that the fear of cats is excessive. People who experience this kind of phobia tend not to feel comfortable when they are outside because they are afraid of cats. Then, based on the results of the researcher's interview with client "T", it was confirmed that he had symptoms of ailurophobia because client "T" had experienced trauma in the past due to cat scratches. This is based on the results of field observations carried out by researchers, the description of ailurophobia experienced by client "T" is someone who has a phobia of cats and feels excessive fear and anxiety when seeing cats.

Based on this, the emotional aspect before the individual counseling service is implemented, namely client "T", whose emotions and thoughts are incoherent, always has excessive fear of cats, always thinks about things that haven't happened, always feels afraid, constantly can't control the emotions of fear. However, after individual counseling, client "T" began to be able to calm down and eliminate feelings that made him afraid and emotional.

Then the cognitive aspect before the counseling service was carried out, client "T" felt lacking and had the courage to think clearly because client "T" was constantly haunted by fear of cats, fear of cats coming out, fear of cats suddenly appearing, and it really disturbed him to carry out his activities. daily. But after the individual counseling service was carried out, client "T" began to be able to eliminate this fear so that client "T" was able to think clearly and no longer felt disturbed by thoughts that made him afraid.

Furthermore, the physiological aspect of client "T" also still feels afraid which causes client "T"'s body to feel tense, feel shaking, feel tremors, the client's heart is pounding because the client always feels constantly afraid, causing things and thoughts that are not certain. It happens again. However, after carrying out individual counseling, client "T" felt better and as he experienced from the aspects above. Client "T" no longer feels trembling, tension, heart palpitations and client "T" feels much better than before.

Based on the explanation above regarding the picture before and after carrying out individual counseling using the systematic desensitization technique. So it is known that client "T" is able to overcome his problems and thoughts from fear and can eliminate phobias about himself and always think positively.

The application of systematic desensitization techniques in addressing client "T"'s ailurophobia has significant implications for scientific knowledge, particularly in the field of psychology and behavioral therapy. By demonstrating how structured interventions can effectively reduce phobic responses, this case underscores the importance of evidence-based practices in therapeutic settings (Apriana Putri, 2023). The successful outcome not only contributes to a deeper understanding of phobia management but also enhances the repertoire of strategies available for practitioners dealing with anxiety disorders. Furthermore, it encourages further exploration into the nuances of individual experiences and responses to specific therapies, fostering a more tailored approach to treatment (Kushendar et al., 2022).

Additionally, the positive transformation observed in client "T" highlights the potential for systematic desensitization to serve as a vital tool in therapeutic frameworks. The shift from a state of overwhelming fear and anxiety to a more composed and rational mindset illustrates the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions in reshaping an individual's emotional and physiological responses (Ugwuanyi et al., 2020). This reinforces the notion that psychological interventions can lead to significant improvements in the quality of life for those suffering from specific phobias. As more cases like client "T" are documented, they can provide valuable insights into the efficacy of different therapeutic modalities, potentially guiding future research and clinical practices in treating anxiety disorders.

### **Implication**

The findings from Client "T"'s experience with systematic desensitization offer significant implications for the treatment of specific phobias, particularly ailurophobia. The successful reduction of fear and anxiety through targeted counseling highlights the effectiveness of this technique in helping individuals confront and manage their irrational fears. Furthermore, this case underscores the importance of addressing both emotional and cognitive aspects of phobias, as improvements in these areas can lead to enhanced physiological responses and overall well-being. Mental health practitioners may consider integrating systematic desensitization into their therapeutic approaches for clients with similar phobias, ensuring that a comprehensive understanding of the individual's experiences and fears is prioritized. This case also emphasizes the need for increased awareness and education around phobias, as many individuals may not recognize their symptoms or understand the impact of past traumas on their current emotional states.

### **Limitation and Recommendations for Future Research**

While the findings from Client "T"'s case provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of systematic desensitization for treating ailurophobia, there are notable limitations to consider. Firstly, the study is based on a single case, which limits the generalizability of the results to a broader population. The unique experiences, background, and psychological makeup of Client "T" may not reflect those of other individuals with similar phobias. Additionally, the research primarily relied on self-reported data, which may be influenced by subjective perceptions and biases.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct larger-scale studies that include diverse populations to better understand the efficacy of systematic desensitization across different contexts and demographics. Longitudinal studies could also be beneficial to assess the long-term effects of this technique on clients with phobias. Moreover, exploring the combination of systematic desensitization with other therapeutic modalities, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy or mindfulness techniques, may provide further insights into enhancing treatment outcomes. Finally, incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could enrich the understanding of clients' experiences and perceptions of their progress throughout the therapeutic process.

## CONCLUSION

The description of Ailurophobia from client "T" includes: his emotions, thoughts and physiology which feel disturbed by feelings of fear. Client "T" feels uncomfortable when he is outside because client "T" thinks that are not positive. The implementation of individual counseling is carried out in 4 (four) meetings through 3 (three) stages, namely the initial stage, middle stage and final stage. In the initial stage, the counselor will build a good relationship by accepting counseling sincerely, opening the counseling correctly and prayerfully explaining the roles and responsibilities between the counselor and the counselee, as well as formulating and identifying the counselee's problems. Then at this stage the counselor will incorporate existing techniques in the systematic desensitization technique in order to achieve the desired goals.

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