Dynamic Hapto-Relaxation: an affective-touched application as a tactile relaxation therapeutic method

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TOUCH IN ACTION

INTRODUCTION

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Dynamic Hapto-Relaxation (DHR) is a standardized tactile relaxation method developed in Belgium (Messelis, 2021; Devreese, 2003). The technique involves a structured sequence of nine consecutive hand movements. These movements incorporate three distinct types of touch: affective-touch-based (ATB) strokes, intense friction (IF), and dynamic movements (DM).This tactile relaxation technique is used by many relaxation therapists during the treatment of patients with various psychosomatic care needs.

Dynamic Hapto-Relaxation

The protocol of the DHR employs a structured sequence of hand movements targeting the face, neck, and shoulders. The procedure consists of nine defined steps, each involving specific forms of therapeutic touch aimed at promoting physiological and psychological relaxation. These include: (1) gentle, affective touch-based effleurage applied in linear strokes over the facial area (ATB); (2) passive rotational mobilisation of the head (DM); (3) light, rhythmic fingertip tapping on the face (ATB); (4) gentle mobilisation of the shoulder joints (DM); (5) deep friction techniques applied to the shoulder and neck musculature (IF); (6) targeted frictions of the paravertebral neck muscles (IF); (7) additional passive rotation of the head (DM); (8) gentle, affective touch-based effleurage with double-line strokes across the face, particularly the forehead (ATB) and (9) final passive rotation of the head (DM).

Effects of the Dynamic Hapto-Relaxation

In the spring of 2025 74 people voluntarily underwent an individual DHR session. At random, the person either underwent DHR+ with attention to all organisational conditions for a tactile relaxation session (N=36) or DHR- without these conditions (N=38). A control group (N=31) underwent breathing meditation (AM). In december 2023 (N=121) and december 2024 (N=121), 242 people underwent the DHR during a group session at the RaakSalon (DHR RS). The groups consisted of a maximum of eight people.

Methodology In addition to other measurements, stress levels were assessed both before and immediately after the intervention using a numerical rating scale (NRS). The NRS, an unidimensional psychometric instrument, allows participants to assess their perceived level of tension on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 represents complete and consciously perceptible relaxation and 10 represents the most extreme tension.

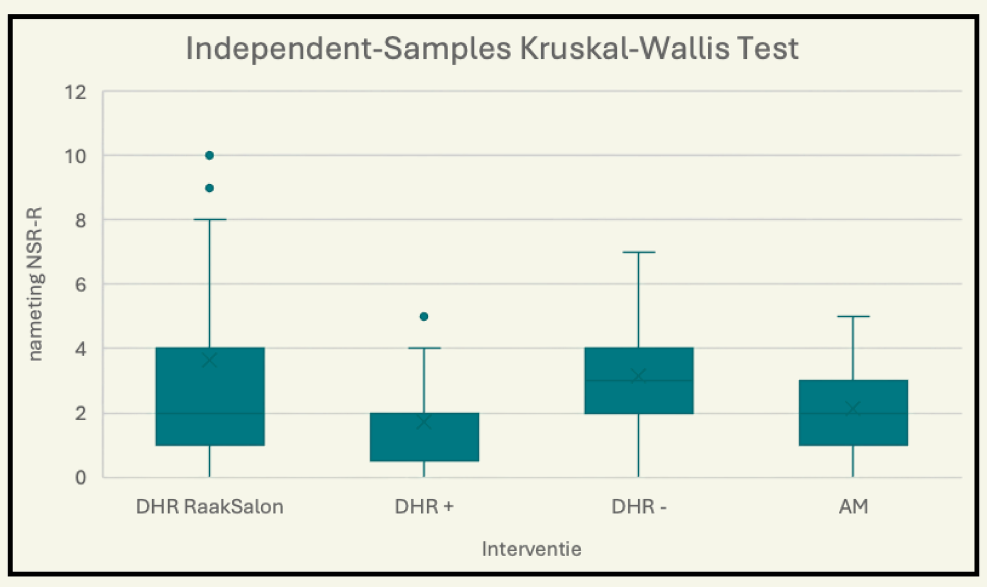
Results Regarding the individual sessions: The average NRS scores for the DHR+ and DHR- were 5.38 and 5.52, respectively. After the DHR+, an average NRS score of 1.75 was recorded, compared to the average NRS score of 2.76 after the DHR-.

Regarding the group sessions (DHR RS): The average NRS score at the start was 5.74 (2023) and 5,70 (2024). After the DHR intervention, this average score dropped to 3.01 (2023) and 3.02 (2024) (tabel 1).

Pairwise comparisons (tabel 2) show that the averages between the totally DHR RS group and the DHR + group and between the DHR + group and the DHR – group differ significantly from each other ($p<0.012$ and $p< 0.015$ respectively).

Datum	Intervention	N	Before DHR	After DHR
Dec, 2023	DHR RS	121	5,74	3,01
Dec, 2024	DHR RS	121	5,70	3,02
Feb, 2025	DHR +	36	5,38	1,75
Feb, 2025	DHR -	38	5,52	2,76

Tabel 1 Means of NRS before and after the DHR



Tabel 2 Comparisons of NRS-means of DHR RS, DHR+ and DHR- (and AM)

Figure 1 Wordcloud (N=316*3)

Qualitative feedback Participants were also asked to describe their experiences in three words, which revealed a consistent pattern of positive emotional responses. Common terms included “relaxed”, “happy”, “pleasant”, “grateful”, “calm” and “peaceful”, indicating a widely shared perception of the calming and mood-enhancing effects of the intervention (figure 1).

Conclusion These preliminary findings suggest that an therapeutical DHR intervention may be an effective method for acute stress reduction. Further research with larger samples and control groups is recommended to validate these results and investigate potential long-term benefits.

HET RAAKSALON

Het RaakSalon is an initiative of relaxation therapist Karl Devreese (VIVES, Bruges, Belgium).

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