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Public Perceptions and Trust in Hypnotherapy within the Context of Science and Stigma

By

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of public perception and social stigma on the level of trust toward hypnotherapy as a psychological treatment method in Indonesia. A quantitative approach was employed through a survey of 200 respondents familiar with hypnotherapy, analyzed using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that positive perceptions significantly increase public trust, while negative social stigma remains a barrier to acceptance. These findings align with the Risk Perception Theory and Social Stigma Theory, emphasizing that trust is shaped by individuals' risk evaluation and socially constructed beliefs. The study suggests enhancing public education and evidence-based communication to improve perceptions, reduce stigma, and strengthen trust in hypnotherapy as a legitimate and scientific therapeutic practice.

Keywords: Perception, Social Stigma, Trust, Hypnotherapy, Public Acceptance

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, alternative therapies such as hypnotherapy have attracted increasing attention in the context of both mental and physical health. For instance, bibliometric analyses indicate that the volume of global research on hypnotherapy has grown substantially, particularly in relation to conditions such as anxiety, pain management, and irritable bowel syndrome (Zhao et al., 2024). However, despite this scientific growth, public perceptions of hypnotherapy often remain shaped by traditional views or persistent stigma, including beliefs that hypnotherapy is mystical, manipulative, or insufficiently scientific (Orewa & Udo, 2023). From the perspective of belief and acceptance, several studies suggest that hypnotherapy holds potential benefits, such as reducing social anxiety or enhancing the outcomes of conventional therapeutic approaches (Zhang et al., 2024). Thus, there is an ongoing tension between the advancement of hypnotherapy as a scientific intervention and the persistence of social stigma surrounding its use.

In Indonesia, for example, reports from Universitas Gadjah Mada indicate that segments of the population continue to hold negative stigmas toward hypnotherapy, despite growing empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness (Salma, 2024). Within the context of modern healthcare services, the integration of hypnotherapy remains limited, and public perceptions regarding its safety, effectiveness, and scientific legitimacy have not yet been extensively measured through quantitative approaches. Consequently, among the general population, perceptions, social stigma, and trust in hypnotherapy constitute important issues that require empirical investigation.

Although scientific evidence supporting hypnotherapy continues to develop, public acceptance is often constrained by negative perceptions and misconceptions, which hinder its broader utilization. For example, social stigma attached to hypnotherapy may reduce levels of trust and indirectly influence individuals' decisions to engage in hypnotherapeutic services. Conversely, when perceptions that hypnotherapy is unscientific or potentially harmful remain prevalent, public acceptance tends to be low, even in the presence of strong empirical evidence. This situation highlights a clear gap between scientific knowledge and public acceptance driven by stigma. The central problem, therefore, concerns how public perceptions and social stigma influence trust in hypnotherapy and, ultimately, its acceptance and use (Salma, 2024).

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Previous research indicates that while the public may generally exhibit neutral to positive attitudes toward hypnotherapy as a complementary approach, negative perceptions related to manipulation and mind control persist (Szmaglinska, Andrew, Massey, et al., 2024). Bibliometric evidence further suggests that approximately 3.8% of respondents in prior surveys particularly those influenced by religious beliefs perceive hypnosis as potentially involving demonic possession (Zhao et al., 2024). Quantitative studies among healthcare professionals also reveal that perceptions and readiness to integrate hypnotherapy into practice are constrained by insufficient training and professional stigma (Szmaglinska, Andrew, Kirk, et al., 2024). Nevertheless, large-scale quantitative data specifically examining the relationship between public perception, social stigma, and trust in hypnotherapy particularly within the Indonesian context remain scarce.

This study is grounded in two primary theoretical frameworks: Risk Perception Theory and Social Stigma Theory. Risk Perception Theory posits that individuals' subjective assessments of risk including perceived probability and severity of potential harm significantly influence their attitudes and behaviors toward accepting or rejecting a given technology, service, or intervention (Encyclopedia, 2025). Social Stigma Theory explains how negative societal views, stereotypes, or attributions attached to a particular method or group can hinder acceptance, trust, and utilization of related services. In the context of hypnotherapy, stigma may arise from concerns that the practice is mystical, unscientific, or prone to manipulation. This concept of stigma can be traced to the work of Erving Goffman, who defined stigma as an attribute, behavior, or reputation that is socially discrediting and leads individuals to be categorized as devalued by others (LiquiSearch, 2025).

Recent studies have highlighted both public and professional perceptions and misconceptions surrounding hypnotherapy. Stein et al. (2023) discuss myths and scientific evidence related to hypnosis, demonstrating that despite increasing empirical support, public perceptions are often influenced by enduring myths; however, their review-based approach does not quantitatively measure public attitudes (Cambridge University Press & Assessment). A scoping review by Szmaglinska, Kirk, and Andrew (2024) found that public awareness of hypnotherapy remains low and is accompanied by widespread misconceptions, yet quantitative data linking perception and stigma to public trust are limited. Another study by Szmaglinska, Andrew, Kirk, et al. (2024) developed an instrument to assess healthcare professionals' perceptions of hypnotherapy in oncology settings, revealing that perceptions and concerns influence attitudes; however, the sample was restricted to healthcare professionals rather than the general public. Similarly, Szmaglinska, Andrew, Massey, et al. (2024) reviewed 35 studies on healthcare professionals' perceptions and knowledge of hypnosis, identifying barriers such as stigma and lack of information, but did not specifically measure public trust. A local Indonesian study by Ardian (2022) surveyed 100 participants to compare public perceptions of hypnotherapy with other psychotherapeutic approaches; while relevant due to its focus on the general population, it did not examine stigma or its direct relationship with trust.

Based on this body of literature, the research gap addressed in this study lies in the absence of a quantitative survey that simultaneously examines how perceptions of hypnotherapy and social stigma influence public trust, particularly within the Indonesian general population. The novelty of this research lies in its empirical measurement of these variables and its analysis of the interaction between perception and stigma in shaping trust. As such, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the development of hypnotherapy as a more socially accepted therapeutic approach.

This research is important in practical terms because it provides insights for hypnotherapy service providers, healthcare practitioners, and policymakers regarding the factors that influence public acceptance of hypnotherapy. By understanding the roles of perception and stigma, strategies for education, public awareness campaigns, and the integration of hypnotherapy into healthcare services can be improved. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the literature on the acceptance of alternative therapies by integrating perception, social stigma, and trust into a single analytical model. It also offers an opportunity to validate or refine Risk Perception Theory and Social Stigma Theory within the context of hypnotherapy. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide an empirical basis for enhancing public trust, reducing stigma-related barriers, and supporting the development and integration of hypnotherapy as a legitimate healthcare service.

This study focuses on analyzing public perceptions and social stigma toward hypnotherapy and their influence on trust in hypnotherapy as a psychological therapeutic method in Indonesia. The primary emphasis is on understanding the extent to which public views regarding the safety, effectiveness, and scientific legitimacy of hypnotherapy (perception), as well as negative beliefs or mystical interpretations (social stigma), affect public trust in hypnotherapy as a legitimate and safe therapeutic intervention. Accordingly, the study not only assesses the level of public acceptance of hypnotherapy but also seeks to identify the social and psychological factors that either facilitate or hinder its acceptance within Indonesian society.

The objective of this research is to comprehensively analyze the influence of public perception and social stigma on trust in hypnotherapy as a psychological therapeutic method in Indonesia. Specifically, the study aims to examine how public views regarding the safety, effectiveness, and scientific foundations of hypnotherapy shape levels of trust in the practice. Additionally, it seeks to assess how social stigma manifested through negative beliefs, mystical interpretations, or perceptions of manipulation may reduce public trust in the legitimacy and benefits of hypnotherapy. Simultaneously, this research investigates the combined effects of perception and social stigma in explaining public trust in hypnotherapy and offers evidence-based recommendations to enhance public acceptance through

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educational approaches and the dissemination of scientifically grounded information.

2. Research Elaborations

This study is grounded in the growing adoption of complementary and alternative therapeutic approaches in mental health care, particularly hypnotherapy. Despite increasing empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness, public acceptance of hypnotherapy remains constrained by non-clinical factors, notably perception and social stigma. Consequently, this research elaborates the relationships between perception of hypnotherapy (X1), social stigma toward hypnotherapy (X2), and trust in hypnotherapy (Y).

Public perception of hypnotherapy constitutes a fundamental determinant of trust formation. A long-term meta-analytic review demonstrates strong empirical support for hypnotherapy, with 99.2% of outcome variables indicating positive effects across diverse physical and mental health conditions (Rosendahl et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the presence of robust scientific evidence does not automatically translate into widespread public acceptance. A global survey of hypnosis practitioners revealed that fewer than one-third consistently apply evidence-based hypnotherapy practices, indicating a substantial gap between scientific validation and practical implementation (McCann, 2023). This disconnect is also evident in Indonesia, where research shows that although 65% of respondents believe hypnotherapy can support mental health treatment, 71% have never undergone hypnotherapy and most lack clarity regarding practitioner authority and professional regulation (Ardian, 2022). These findings suggest that perception (X1) reflects not only evaluations of safety and effectiveness but also levels of health literacy and informational exposure.

Beyond individual perception, social stigma represents a critical sociocultural barrier to hypnotherapy acceptance. Stigma often manifests as beliefs that hypnotherapy is mystical, manipulative, or unscientific. In the Indonesian context, professional reports indicate that the term “hypnosis” continues to carry negative connotations despite academic efforts to integrate hypnotherapy with neuroscience-based frameworks (Salma, 2024). Supporting this perspective, meta-analytic evidence in mental health research identifies stigma as a major deterrent to help-seeking behavior and service utilization (Crockett et al., 2025). Furthermore, a scoping review examining perceptions of hypnosis found that although general attitudes tend to be favorable, misinformation, limited understanding, and low public awareness persist (Szmaglinska, Kirk, & Andrew, 2024). Accordingly, social stigma (X2) functions as a significant inhibiting factor that can undermine trust in hypnotherapy.

Trust in hypnotherapy (Y) is defined in this study as the belief that hypnotherapy is a legitimate, safe, and beneficial therapeutic modality. Empirical research continues to support its feasibility and effectiveness, including studies demonstrating the utility of hypnosis-based interventions in reducing fear of falling among older adults (Cuvelier et al., 2023). However, empirical investigations explicitly measuring public trust in hypnotherapy remain scarce. Even among healthcare professionals, evidence points to persistent knowledge gaps and varying levels of acceptance, despite recognition of its potential therapeutic value (Szmaglinska, Andrew, Kirk, et al., 2024). This indicates that trust in hypnotherapy is shaped not solely by empirical outcomes, but also by subjective perceptions and socially constructed meanings.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates Risk Perception Theory and Social Stigma Theory to explain the proposed relationships among variables. Risk Perception Theory posits that individuals’ acceptance of a service or intervention is influenced by their subjective assessment of its safety and benefits. Within the context of hypnotherapy, positive perceptions of scientific validity and therapeutic effectiveness are expected to enhance trust. Conversely, Social Stigma Theory explains how negative labeling and societal stereotypes can obstruct acceptance and reduce trust, even in the presence of strong empirical evidence. Thus, social stigma may exert both a direct negative influence on trust and a moderating effect that weakens the positive relationship between perception and trust.

Based on the integration of empirical findings and theoretical perspectives, this study positions perception of hypnotherapy (X1) and social stigma toward hypnotherapy (X2) as key determinants of public trust in hypnotherapy (Y). The proposed conceptual framework suggests that favorable perceptions are likely to increase trust, whereas heightened social stigma may diminish it. Therefore, empirically testing these relationships is essential for strengthening public literacy, reducing stigma, and supporting the development of hypnotherapy as an evidence-based mental health service.

3. Results or Finding

Based on the theoretical review and prior empirical findings, this study proposes that public perception of hypnotherapy and the social stigma surrounding it play a crucial role in shaping public trust in hypnotherapy. Accordingly, two hypotheses are formulated: (1) perception of hypnotherapy has a positive and significant effect on trust in hypnotherapy, and (2) social stigma has a negative and significant effect on trust in hypnotherapy. These hypothesized relationships are illustrated in the conceptual framework, which positions perception (X1) and social stigma (X2) as independent variables influencing trust in hypnotherapy (Y). The framework highlights two primary causal paths corresponding to the proposed hypotheses, providing a clear structure for empirical testing.

Methodologically, this study adopts a quantitative descriptive-associative approach to examine the relationships among the variables using Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Data are collected through an online survey distributed to Indonesian adults aged 18 years and above who are familiar with hypnotherapy, using purposive sampling to ensure relevance. Measurement is conducted through a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale, with indicators adapted from established studies. Data analysis is carried out using SmartPLS 4.0, involving evaluation of the measurement model for validity and reliability, followed by assessment of the structural

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model to test the proposed hypotheses through path coefficients, R-square values, effect sizes, and bootstrapping procedures. This approach enables a robust examination of both the measurement quality and the causal relationships within the proposed research model.

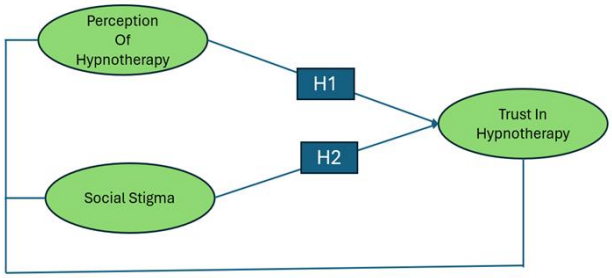

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, and educational background, which are essential for understanding the composition of the research sample.

Table 3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 200)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	41.0
	Female	118	59.0
Age (Years)	18–25 years	64	32.0
	26–35 years	78	39.0
	36–45 years	42	21.0
	>45 years	16	8.0
Occupation	Student	48	24.0
	Private Sector Employee	72	36.0
	Civil Servant / Public Employee	28	14.0
	Entrepreneur	34	17.0
	Others (freelancers, homemakers, etc.)	18	9.0
Total		200	100.0

Source: Google Form

Based on Table 3.1, the study involved 200 respondents, all of whom were above the age of 18. The majority of respondents were female (59%) and belonged to the 26–35 age group (39%), which represents the young adult category. In terms of occupation, most respondents were private sector employees (36%), followed by students (24%) and entrepreneurs (17%). These findings indicate that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals in the productive age group who are actively engaged in employment and education, making them relevant to the research context of hypnotherapy and psychological well-being.

3.2 Outer Model Evaluation

3.2.1 Outer Loading Test

To ensure that each indicator adequately represents the measured variable, an outer loading test was conducted. Outer loading values were used to assess the validity of the indicators within the measurement model.

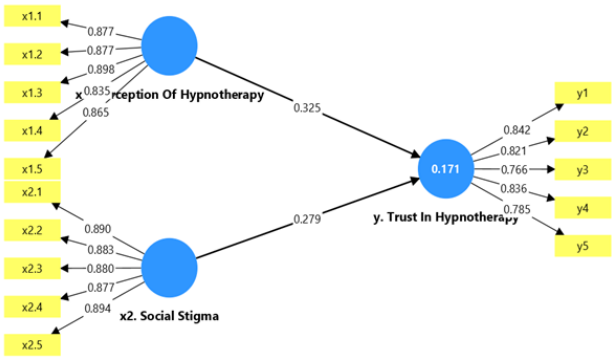

Figure 3.2 Outer Loading Diagrams

Source: Statistical Data Processing

Table 3.2 Outer Loading

Indicator	X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy	X2: Social Stigma	Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy
X1.1	0.877		
X1.2	0.877		
X1.3	0.898		
X1.4	0.835		
X1.5	0.865		
X2.1		0.890	
X2.2		0.883	
X2.3		0.880	
X2.4		0.877	
X2.5		0.894	
Y1			0.842
Y2			0.821

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Indicator	X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy	X2: Social Stigma	Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy
Y3			0.766
Y4			0.836
Y5			0.785

Source: Statistical Data Processing

Based on the results of the outer loading analysis, all indicators for the variables perception of hypnotherapy (X1), social stigma (X2), and trust in hypnotherapy (Y) exhibited loading factor values greater than 0.70. This indicates that all indicators meet the criteria for convergent validity, as they adequately represent their respective latent constructs.

3.2.2 Composite Validity and Reliability Results

Prior to further analysis, construct reliability and validity were assessed to ensure that the measurement instrument possesses sufficient consistency and precision in capturing the latent variables.

Table 3.3 Composite Validity and Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ρa)	Composite Reliability (ρc)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy	0.920	0.928	0.940	0.758
X2: Social Stigma	0.931	0.932	0.947	0.783
Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy	0.871	0.901	0.905	0.657

Source: Statistical Data Processing

Based on the results presented in Table 3.3, all constructs demonstrate Cronbach's Alpha values greater than 0.70, Composite Reliability values (ρa and ρc) exceeding 0.70, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.50. These results indicate that each construct exhibits excellent reliability and satisfactory convergent validity. This implies that the indicators for each variable consistently and adequately represent their respective constructs. Therefore, all research variables are deemed reliable and valid for use in subsequent structural model analysis.

3.2.3 Discriminant Validity Results

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) to ensure that each construct is conceptually distinct and measures a unique latent variable.

Table 3.4 Discriminant Validity Results

Variable	X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy	X2: Social Stigma	Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy
X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy	—	0.081	0.320
X2: Social Stigma		—	0.280
Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy			—

Source: Statistical Data Processing

Based on the results of the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) analysis presented in Table 3.4, all inter-construct HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Specifically, the HTMT value between perception of hypnotherapy and social stigma is 0.081, between perception of hypnotherapy and trust in hypnotherapy is 0.320, and between social stigma and trust in hypnotherapy is 0.280. These results indicate that each construct demonstrates adequate discriminant validity, meaning that the variables in the research model are empirically distinct and do not exhibit multicollinearity. Therefore, the measurement model satisfies the criteria for discriminant validity and can be advanced to the structural model (inner model) analysis.

3.3 Structural Model Evaluation

3.3.1 R-Square Test

To determine the extent to which the independent variables contribute to the dependent variable, an R-square analysis was conducted. The R-square value indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables in the model.

Table 3.5 R-Square Test

Variabel Dependen	R-square	R-square Adjusted
y. Kepercayaan terhadap hipnoterapi	0.171	0.163

Source: Statistical Data Processing

An R-square value of 0.171 indicates that the regression model explains 17.1% of the variance in trust in hypnotherapy through the independent variables included in the model. Meanwhile, the adjusted R-square value of 0.163 shows that, after accounting for the number of variables and sample size, approximately 16.3% of the variance in trust in hypnotherapy is explained by the model. Therefore, the explanatory power of the model can be considered low, suggesting that other factors outside the model also influence trust in hypnotherapy.

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3.3.2 F-Square Test

To determine the magnitude of the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, an f-square analysis was conducted. This value indicates the effect size contributed by each variable within the research model.

Table 3.6 F-Square Test

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	f^2
X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy	Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy	.127
X2: Social Stigma	Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy	.093

Source: Statistical Data Processing

The f-square (f^2) values indicate the magnitude of the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. According to Cohen's (1988) criteria, effect sizes of 0.02 are considered small, 0.15 medium, and 0.35 large. Based on these thresholds, perception of hypnotherapy (f^2 = 0.127) exhibits a small to near-moderate effect on trust in hypnotherapy, while social stigma (f^2 = 0.093) demonstrates a small effect on trust in hypnotherapy. These results suggest that perception of hypnotherapy exerts a stronger influence than social stigma in explaining trust in hypnotherapy.

3.4 Hypothesis Testing

To test the validity of the previously formulated hypotheses, a path coefficient analysis was conducted. The path coefficient values indicate the direction of the relationships between variables, while the t-statistic and p-value are used to determine the significance of these effects.

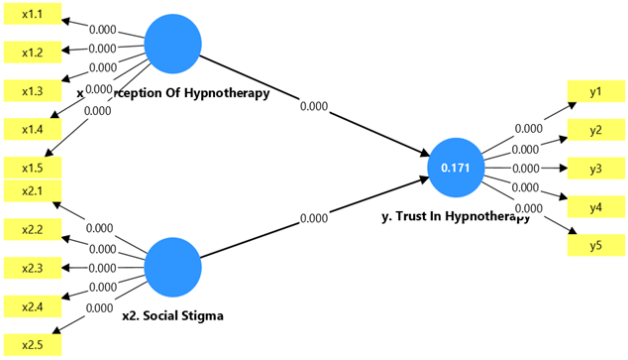

Figure 3.2 Path Coefficients Diagrams

Source: Statistical Data Processing

Tabel 4.1 Path Coefficients

Relationship Between Variables	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-Statistic	p-Value
X1: Perception of Hypnotherapy → Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy	0.325	0.335	0.052	6.222	0.000
X2: Social Stigma → Y: Trust in Hypnotherapy	0.279	0.287	0.060	4.644	0.000

Source: Statistical Data Processing

The hypothesis testing results indicate that both effects are statistically significant, as the p-values (0.000) are below the 0.05 threshold. First, perception of hypnotherapy (β = 0.325) has a positive and significant effect on trust in hypnotherapy, suggesting that the more positive an individual's perception, the higher their trust in hypnotherapy. Second, social stigma (β = 0.279) also has a positive and significant effect on trust in hypnotherapy, indicating that lower social stigma (or a more favorable social view) is associated with higher trust in hypnotherapy. Based on the path coefficients, the effect of perception of hypnotherapy is slightly stronger than that of social stigma in explaining trust in hypnotherapy.

3.5 Discussions

The results of this study indicate that public perception of hypnotherapy has a positive influence on the level of trust, whereas social stigma also plays a role in shaping trust, albeit with a relatively weaker effect. These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework employed, namely the Risk Perception Theory and Social Stigma Theory, which explain that attitudes and trust in a healthcare service are determined by how individuals evaluate the risks, safety, and social legitimacy of that service. Empirically, these results support the findings of Stein et al. (2023) and Zhang et al. (2024), which suggest that a positive perception of hypnotherapy for example, the belief that the method is safe and science-based can enhance public acceptance. In other words, the greater an individual's understanding of the scientific foundation of hypnotherapy, the higher their confidence in its benefits. This also reinforces Ardian's (2022) study in Indonesia, which found that limited public understanding led to doubts about hypnotherapy, even though many acknowledged its potential benefits.

Meanwhile, the findings related to social stigma show that negative views such as the perception that hypnotherapy is mystical, manipulative, or inconsistent with social values continue to affect public trust. This aligns with the scoping review by Szmaglinska, Kirk, & Andrew (2024), which highlighted that misconceptions and a lack of understanding about hypnotherapy remain major barriers to public acceptance. In the Indonesian context, as noted by Salma (2024), the term "hypnosis" is still often associated with mystical practices, reinforcing social resistance despite growing scientific evidence. When linked to the literature review, these

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findings support the view that perception and social stigma are two key variables determining the level of public trust in hypnotherapy. Rosendahl et al. (2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of hypnotherapy in various health conditions, emphasizing that the scientific basis of this therapy is strong. However, as also observed in this study, scientific evidence alone does not automatically lead to increased public trust, due to a persistent gap between science and social perception.

These results further support the Risk Perception Theory, which suggests that individuals who perceive the risks of hypnotherapy as low and its benefits as high are more likely to trust and accept the therapy. Conversely, the Social Stigma Theory explains that negative labels attached by society can diminish trust, even when rational perceptions of its benefits increase. Thus, the two theories complement each other in explaining the findings of this study positive perceptions enhance trust, while stigma acts as a barrier slowing social acceptance of hypnotherapy. Practically, these findings underscore the importance of public education strategies and evidence-based campaigns to reduce stigma and improve public perception. Integrating hypnotherapy into formal healthcare systems requires communication approaches that bridge the gap between science and social trust. With increased public understanding, confidence in hypnotherapy can grow stronger, aligning with the objectives of this study to support the development of hypnotherapy as a legitimate and widely accepted therapeutic practice.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that positive public perception of hypnotherapy plays a crucial role in enhancing trust in this method, whereas lingering social stigma remains a barrier to public acceptance. Individuals who understand hypnotherapy as a scientific, safe, and effective approach tend to have higher confidence in its benefits, while negative views associating hypnotherapy with mystical or manipulative practices reduce such trust. These findings support the Risk Perception Theory and Social Stigma Theory, which explain that individuals' trust in a service is influenced by how they assess its risks and the social labels attached to it. Empirically, the results of this study align with previous research, such as Stein et al. (2023), Szmaglinska et al. (2024), and Ardian (2022), which indicate that misconceptions and limited scientific understanding are major factors restricting public acceptance of hypnotherapy. Accordingly, this study underscores the importance of evidence-based educational approaches and effective public communication to reduce stigma, improve perceptions, and enhance public trust in hypnotherapy as a legitimate and science-based psychological therapeutic practice.

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