

## **Effectiveness of Expressive Writing Therapy Method on Psychological Well-Being of Students**

Mardiatusaleha, Riska Herlinda, Dien Novita  
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang  
Corresponding Email: [sholehamardia@gmail.com](mailto:sholehamardia@gmail.com)

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### **ABSTRACT**

The student stage is a period that is vulnerable to psychological problems. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of expressive writing therapy to improve the psychological well-being of students. This therapy is carried out online, where the subject receives instructions via chat and writes on the google form that has been provided. The therapy is carried out as many as two meetings with a span of 14 hours starting at 19.00-10.00 WIB working on therapy at each subject's leisure time. The subjects in this study were students. This study used a pre-experimental design, namely one group pretest-posttest, which was conducted with only one treatment group. The measuring instrument used to measure psychological well-being in this study is the Ryff and Keyes (1995) psychological well-being scale which has been adapted to Indonesian language and culture by Rachmayani and Ramdhani (2014). This measuring instrument consists of 48 items with item correlation values ranging from 0.304 to 0.580 and measuring instrument reliability of 0.912. While the results of the Paired Samples T-Test test obtained in this research are  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ . This shows that expressive writing therapy has an effect on the subject's psychological well-being which has a significant difference between the psychological well-being of respondents before and after the intervention.

### **Introduction**

College is a period that can be challenging for some people. This is because there are some students who are in the transition stage between adolescence and adulthood or also known as early adulthood which is at the age level of 18-25 years. In this period, students are no longer in the adolescent stage, and they are no longer dependent on certain figures as they were in children and adolescents, but students also have not fully accepted the responsibilities of adults in general (Arnett, 2000). Based on data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health kemkes.go.id. in 2023 that Indonesia has as many as 6.1% of the population aged 15 years and over experiencing mental health disorders.

The results of research from Melani & Eko (2023) state that 7 out of 46 students experience mental disorders. Symptoms of mental health disorders are in the form of anxiety or anxiety and also experience sleep disorders. Likewise, the results of research from Kurniasari, Rusmana, & Budiman (2019) show that the survey results show that many

students feel easily anxious, afraid, confused, inferior, and less willing to open up to others. And in the results of this study showed that of the 79 respondents 46% had moderate psychological well-being and 38% were low.

Seen because of the many pressures experienced by students from the tasks of recovery and responsibility for themselves (Awaliyah & Listiyandini, 2017). From the many problems experienced by students, this can interfere with their psychological well-being. According to Ryff & Keyes, (1995) there are Six psychological functions: positive evaluation of oneself and one's previous life (self-acceptance), self-development and growth (self-growth), belief that one has a purpose (life purpose), existence; Quality relationships with others (positive relationships with others), ability to manage life and the environment (environmental control), self-determination (autonomy).

Huppert (2009) says that psychological well-being is a guide between feeling good and being able to function effectively. Well-being that is constantly felt by someone does not always mean comfort that exists at all times. However, if someone experiences painful emotions, such as disappointment, failure, or despair, it is normal in life. However, psychological well-being will deteriorate when negative emotions are extreme or last long, which will interfere with individuals to function fully in carrying out daily life. In various studies, psychological well-being has been found to be related to health conditions (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

There is research that states that first-year students experience lower psychological well-being. This is due to increased responsibility, independence, and adaptation to a new environment. Students must be more responsible for themselves, make decisions independently and adapt to new situations (Awaliyah & Listiyandini, 2017). Psychological well-being is a protective factor in the initial adaptation process of college. Students face many challenges in addition to achieving good grades students also face the risk of impaired social functioning in the context of development, broader social changes, finances and also because of the specific demands of academics (Sharma & Tankha, 2014).

There are many ways to improve the psychological well-being of students, one of which is by using the Expressive writing therapy method. Expressive writing therapy is one of the interventions in the form of cognitive psychotherapy that can overcome problems of depression, anxiety, and stress, because this therapy is a therapy for reflecting on the deepest thoughts and feelings about unpleasant events. Or a simpler word is expressing yourself through writing. According to Epore, Greenberg, Bruno, and Smyth (Travagin, Margola, Dennis, & Revenson, 2016). stated that expressive writing allows individuals to observe themselves against existing stressors by expressing and assessing the negative emotions that arise. Meanwhile, according to Gorelick (Malchiodi, 2007) expressive writing is what is being done when writing in a diary. Generally, expressive writing is a personal writing exercise and is designed to enhance creativity and self-confidence, interpersonal communication skills, emotional expression, problem-solving and adaptive skills. During the writing process, unpleasant situations will seem more controllable, which leads to a sense

of emotional mastery and better and better adjustment in various areas of health. Specifically, there are three basic mechanisms: emotional mechanism, cognitive mechanism and exposure mechanism.

Stages of implementation of expressive writing therapy. Hynes & Hynes (in Malchiodi, 2007), and Thompson (in Bolton et al., 2004) divide expressive writing therapy into four stages, namely:

- a. Recognition/Initial write is the opening stage to the writing session. This stage aims to open the imagination, focus the mind, relax and eliminate fears that may arise in the client, as well as evaluate the client's mood or concentration condition. Clients are given the opportunity to free write words, phrases or express anything else that comes to mind without planning and direction. In addition to writing, this session can also begin with a warm-up, simple movements or playing an instrument. This stage lasts for 6 minutes.
- b. Examination/writing exercise. This stage aims to explore the client's reaction to a particular situation. This is the stage where the writing process is carried out. The instructions given are like those used by Pennebaker (2007). The time given for writing varies from 10-30 minutes per session. After writing the client can also be given the opportunity to re-read their writing and improve it. The number of meetings ranges from 3-5 consecutive sessions or once a week. In addition, expressive writing therapy can be done both individually and in groups. The scope of writing topics can also be expanded to more general emotional events or specific events that the individual has experienced, such as being diagnosed with a chronic illness, losing a job, or entering college (Pennebaker & Chung, 2007). In addition, topics are not only related to past experiences, but also to current and future situations (Dalton, 2009).
- c. Alignment/Feedback  
This stage is a reflection tool that encourages the acquisition of new awareness and inspires new behaviors, attitudes, or values, and allows the individual to gain a deeper understanding of themselves. The writing that the client has made can be read, reflected upon, or it can also be developed, refined, and discussed with another person or group that the client can trust. The main thing explored at this stage is how the writer felt when completing the writing task and or when reading.
- d. Application to the self In this last stage, clients are encouraged to apply their new knowledge in the real world. The counselor or therapist helps the client integrate what has been learned during the writing session by reflecting back on what should be changed or improved and what needs to be maintained. In addition, a reflection on the benefits of writing for the client is also conducted. The counselor also needs to ask if the client is experiencing any discomfort or additional help to cope with problems as a result of the writing process they are participating in.

Based on research that has been conducted by several researchers, there is a positive effect of using expressive writing therapy on physical and mental health. McGuire, Greenberg, and Gevirt (in Pennebaker & Chung, 2007) concluded that there was a decrease in autonomic nervous system and cardiovascular activity that showed responses as experienced by individuals in the relaxation process in subjects who were given expressive writing tasks. Writing also has an impact on student activeness in the discussion process (Pennebaker, 2002). In addition, based on research by Dalton (2009) and Ramirez & Beilok (2011), it is known that writing can also improve prospective students' performance on college entrance exams and their physical health, and reduce anxiety in facing exams.

In addition, from several other studies conducted by Pennebaker and his colleagues (in Kaufman & Kaufman, 2009) it was also found that there was an increase in student learning achievement, concentration, short-term memory capacity, and improved self-image. In Indonesia itself, there have been several researchers who have tested the effectiveness of writing therapy in various contexts. Susilawati (2009) and Qonitatin, Widyawati, and Asih (2011) examined the effect of emotional experience writing therapy on reducing mild depression. Fikri (2012) used writing therapy to express angry emotions in adolescent boys.

## Method

The purpose of this study was to examine an expressive writing module designed by the researcher herself on Psychological well-being in students. This study shows that expressive writing can improve a person's psychological well-being. Psychologists have widely researched the use of writing as a therapeutic medium. Because the subject is asked to express emotions and the subject writes according to the themes that have been given by the researcher. In this study, expressive writing therapy was conducted online where the research subjects wrote through Gform to fill in the questions that had been made by the researcher.

In this study using quantitative methods which according to (Sugiyono, 2019) quantitative research is one of the studies that uses numbers to process data and then analyze it with systematic analysis and experimental approaches. According to (Arikunto, 2010) said that experimental research is one way to find the results of causal relationships between factors A and B that are caused intentionally by researchers, ruling out other factors that want to interfere. This research design is pre-experimental, namely one group pretest-posttest which is carried out with only one group given a certain treatment and then assessed before and after treatment (Sri et al 2021).

The sampling technique used in this study was incidental sampling. The number of subjects in this study was 16 people who were active students. Before conducting treatment to the subject, the researcher gave a pretest first, after which the subject was given treatment where the subject conducted expressive writing therapy, then after the treatment was completed the subject was given a posttest.

The measuring instrument used to measure psychological well-being in this study is the Ryff and Keyes (1995) psychological well-being scale which has been adapted to Indonesian language and culture by Rachmayani and Ramdhani (2014). This measuring instrument consists of 48 items with item correlation values ranging from 0.304 to 0.580 and measuring instrument reliability of 0.912. In this study, researchers made modifications to the editorial items of measuring instruments to adjust to the conditions and needs of the study. The modified psychological well-being scale has 48 items. to measure each dimension of psychological well-being, namely independence, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, life goals, and self-acceptance.

The adaptation scale from Rachmayani and Ramdhani (2014) uses a Likert model with five (5) alternative answers, namely SS (Very Suitable), AS (Somewhat Suitable), S (Suitable), TS (Not suitable), and STS (Very Not Suitable). The assessment is given to statements in favorable form, namely in the form of numbers 5 SS (Strongly Conform) to 1 STS (Strongly Disagree). Meanwhile, the assessment is given to statements in the form of unfavorable, namely in the form of numbers 1 SS (Very Suitable) to 5 STS (Very not suitable). Data analysis from this study used the JASP version 0.9.2 application.

The stages of the research procedure carried out by researchers are (1) looking for research subjects (2) researchers grouped subjects, namely group A and group B (3) filling out the consent form (4) researchers gave a pre-test to each research subject (5) giving two sessions of writing expressions through Gform for two days or two meetings to group A (6) researchers gave a post-test to all research subjects (7) giving the same treatment to group B, namely writing expressions through Gform. Before starting the expressive menukil therapy session, the subject was given the measuring instrument first, namely the Psychological well-being scale. To see the level of psychological well-being first. Expressive writing therapy procedure as follows:

1. The working time of Expression Writing Therapy is from 19.00- 10.00 pm (In leisure time)
2. When the first meeting was conducted with introductions.
3. The researcher sends a gform at each meeting which contains several themes to be answered by the subject. The sessions are as follows:
  - The first meeting  
Self-recognition and development.  
Subjects were asked to write 1) opinions about themselves, whether they have met expectations or not 2) assess their own strengths and weaknesses 3) changes that have occurred recently 4) fears and hopes in life. Positive Relationship. Subjects were asked to write 1) Relationship with people around 2) free writing about anything felt 3) pleasant and unpleasant experiences with people around 4) expectations of people around.
  - Meeting two Environmental  
Environmental mastery and independence

Subjects were asked to write 1) painful events experienced 2) problems faced at this time and whether there is a solution or not 3) Demands and pressures from close people. Demands and pressures from close people.

Life Purpose

Subjects were asked to write 1) free writing and release their hurt feelings 2) things they are grateful for in life 3) ways to develop themselves and achieve their dreams 4) thank you letters to themselves.

4. The researcher guarantees the confidentiality of the subject's writing and the subject may write a message to the researcher if his writing cannot be read by the researcher.
5. The next meeting began by reviewing the subject's opinion regarding the theme of the instructions in the previous session, which would then be summarized.
6. After the review, the researcher distributed the instructions for the next session with the same procedure as the previous therapy session where the subject was given time to write according to the instructions given. The researcher also helped inform the subjects that their writing would not be shared with anyone but only read by one researcher.

### Result and Discussion

This study involved 16 subjects of students. This online writing expressive therapy was conducted with two meetings. And about 10 minutes before the therapy, the facilitator contacted the subject to provide a gfrom where the subject could write. The facilitator helps ensure that all subjects can convey their feelings and opinions through the gfrom that has been provided. At the first meeting there were several subjects who were still reluctant and difficult to express their feelings and opinions, some of these subjects still used formal language such as "I" then there were also those who only answered with one word "yes".

From this, for the next meeting the facilitator suggested that the subject be more relaxed, not have to use formal language, and just express their feelings freely. And the facilitator explained more that what they wrote would be guaranteed confidentiality. then for the second meeting, some subjects were open to expressing the feelings they felt that day. The hypothesis test used is the paired samples T-Test test to determine whether there is a difference before and after treatment by looking at the difference in pretest and posttest scores so that the effectiveness of expressive writing therapy can be known.

**Tabel 1. Paired Samples T-Test**

	Test	Statistic	df	p	Effect Size
PRE-TEST - POST TEST	Student	-5.918	15	< .001	-1.480
	Wilcoxon	1.000		< .001	-0.985

Based on the Paired Samples T-Test table, the p-value is  $<0.001$  for the Student t-test and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. A p-value smaller than 0.05 indicates a significant result. This shows that there is a significant difference between the psychological well-being of respondents before and after the intervention.

**Tabel 2. Test of Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)**

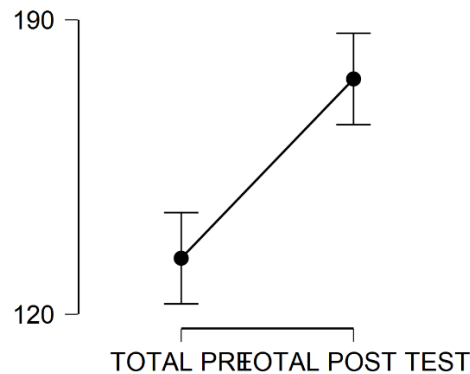
		<b>W</b>	<b>p</b>
TOTAL PRE	-	TOTAL POST TEST	0.962 0.707

Based on the normality test with Shapiro-Wilk, the p value is 0.707 for the TOTAL POST TEST variable. A p value greater than 0.05 indicates that the data is normally distributed. This indicates that the normality assumption is met for the TOTAL POST TEST variable.

**Tabel 3. Descriptives**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>SE</b>
TOTAL PRE	16	133.3	15.15	3.787
TOTAL POST TEST	16	175.9	22.76	5.689

Based on the descriptive table, it can be concluded that the average psychological well-being of respondents before the intervention (TOTAL PRE) was 133.3 with a standard deviation of 15.15 and the average psychological well-being of respondents after the intervention (TOTAL POST TEST) was 175.9 with a standard deviation of 22.76. This shows an increase in the average psychological well-being of respondents by 42.6 after the intervention.



**Image 1. Descriptives Plot**

The value of  $d = -1.480$  indicates a large effect. This means that the mean post-test score is 1.480 standard deviations lower than the mean pre-test score. The value of  $r = -0.985$  indicates that there is a strong and negative correlation between the pre-test and post-test scores. This means that participants who had higher pre-test scores experienced a smaller increase in psychological well-being than participants who had lower pre-test scores.

## Discussion

The results showed that there was a significant increase in the psychological well-being of respondents after the intervention. This shows that the intervention provided is effective in improving the psychological well-being of respondents. This improvement in psychological well-being can be seen from the increase in the average score of TOTAL POST TEST compared to TOTAL PRE. This shows that the intervention provided is able to have a positive impact on the psychological well-being of respondents.

This improvement in psychological well-being can be caused by several factors, namely the intervention provided is able to increase respondents' sense of happiness and satisfaction with their lives, the intervention provided is able to increase respondents' ability to cope with stress and the intervention provided is able to improve respondents' social relationships with others.

In college students, there are several factors that can affect their psychological well-being. Among them are problems related to falling academic grades, a lot of assignments, an increase in students who drop out, and even an increase in suicidal ideation among students. According to Wynaden, Wichmann, & Murray (2013), students are an 'at-risk' group because they are entering an age where most people in early adulthood enter higher education and also coincide with the age of onset of various psychological disorders such as anxiety and psychological disorders.

Regarding psychological problems can be overcome in various ways, one of which is by expressive writing. Expressive writing is a process of expressing feelings thoughts, and experiences experienced throughout an individual's life in written words. (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Based on a meta-analysis from Sarahdevina, P. N., & Yudiarso, A. (2022) states that writing can be a means of catharsis for adults who have unpleasant past experiences. (Fitria et al, 2017) also revealed Expressive writing is an activity or a process that requires the integration of a person's thoughts, affections, and motor skills. In a cognitive perspective, confrontation carried out by retelling events either orally or in writing can help the process of cognitive assimilation of these emotional events (Greenberg, 1996). In addition, writing is a form of process that involves the subconscious. Psychoanalysis reveals that the writing process is strongly influenced by factors such as pleasure, desire, fantasy, and anxiety, which, moreover, are often unconscious (Bracher, 1999).

According to psychoanalytic theory, humans have a conscious mind (related to awareness of the outside world), a pre-conscious mind (which contains memories of hidden or forgotten experiences that can still be remembered), and an unconscious mind (containing instincts, hidden powers) (Gladding in Oktisari, 2021). Meanwhile, (Fivush, Reynold, and Brewin, 2007) say that when individuals experience difficulties or obstacles to express disturbing thoughts and emotions, when these thoughts and emotions can be released or expressed, it will provide catharsis for individuals. This is also supported in this study where some subjects gave thanks for this therapy because they felt a little relieved and better because they could express their emotions through writing.

This is also in line with the opinion of Pennebaker and Chung (2011), who state that expressive writing is able to release previously unexpressed negative emotions as a catharsis that relieves feelings that were previously raging. By writing it down we can confront the emotions that were previously suppressed. This can improve a person's psychological well-being, especially the subjects in this study who are active students.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that there was a significant increase in the psychological well-being of respondents after the intervention. This shows that the intervention provided is effective in improving the psychological well-being of respondents. This improvement in psychological well-being can be seen from the increase in the average score of TOTAL POST TEST compared to TOTAL PRE. This shows that the intervention provided is able to have a positive impact on the psychological well-being of respondents. This improvement in psychological well-being can be caused by several factors, namely the intervention provided is able to increase respondents' sense of happiness and satisfaction with their lives, the intervention provided is able to increase respondents' ability to cope with stress and the intervention provided is able to improve respondents' social relationships with others.

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