

## **The Effect Of Writing Therapy On Emotional Experiences On Stress In Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to evaluate the effect of emotional experience writing therapy on stress levels in students in Palembang City. The research method used was an experiment with a pre-test post-test control group design. The research participants consisted of 17 students from various universities in Palembang City who were chosen randomly. The experimental group took part in a therapy session to write about emotional experiences for 3 days. The research results show that writing therapy on emotional experiences has a significant influence in reducing stress levels in students. The experimental group showed a more significant reduction in stress levels. These findings indicate that writing therapy on emotional experiences can be an effective method for reducing stress in students in Palembang City.

### **Introduction**

According to Susilowati and Hasanat (2011), the general understanding of students is the highest role in the world of education, regulating human behavior patterns from childhood to real roles. It can be said that student affairs is a process whose way of thinking leads to a higher attitude or seriousness in carrying out one's duties.

The meaning or definition of students in Indonesian Government Regulation No. 30 of 1990 is students who are registered and studying at certain universities. Furthermore, according to Kurniawati and Baroroh (2016), a student is anyone who is officially registered to take courses at a university with an age limit of approximately 18 to 30 years.

Stress is also often experienced by students. Zuama's (2014) research shows that students who study from semester 1 to semester 8 tend to experience stress. The stress felt by students is caused by, among other things, low average grades, changes in curriculum, strict university regulations, completing coursework on time,

parental demands, and lack of rest due to participation in various organizations, due to various factors, including a decrease in activity. Participation in lectures, requirements to immediately complete courses, desire to receive an honorary degree after graduation, and obstacles in completing the thesis. Furthermore, Sarafino and Smith (2014) found that academic stress is a condition where individuals are unable to cope with environmental demands, causing uncomfortable situations and feeling nervous.

Stress is a common mental health problem experienced by students throughout the world. High academic loads, social pressure, and high expectations can cause significant levels of stress in students. According to a survey conducted by the American College Health Association in 2020, around 60% of college students reported that they felt a lot of stress in the past 12 months. According to Silverman, Heim, Nater, Marques, and Sternberg (2010). Stress is the body's response to changes that require physical, psychological and emotional reactions, adjustments and adaptations, and can cause frustration, anger, nervousness and anxiety.

Symptoms and Impact of Stress Everyone experiences stress differently, but the most common symptom is sleep disturbances. Weight gain or loss, stomach ache, irritability, teeth grinding, panic attacks, headaches, difficulty concentrating, sweaty hands and feet, stomach ulcers, oversleeping, social isolation, fatigue, nausea, feeling overwhelmed, obsessive or compulsive behavior ( The American Stress Institute, 2018).

To deal with stress, various approaches have been developed, one of which is writing therapy. Writing therapy is a writing activity that reflects the client's thoughts and expressions, either through the client's own initiative or suggestions from the therapist or researcher (Wright, 2004). The focus of writing therapy is more on the writing process rather than the results of the writing itself. Therefore, it is important that writing is a personal activity, free from criticism and not limited by linguistic rules such as grammar, syntax and form. (Bolton, 2004). Therefore, writing can be considered as a form of therapy that uses simple, inexpensive, and feedback-free techniques (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker and Chung, 2007).

The effectiveness of writing about emotional experiences in reducing depression has been demonstrated by Purwandari's (2004) research on teenagers recovering from drug addiction. Purwandari said that positive thinking occurs because of a decrease in biased autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is the emotional content of events experienced by adolescents, whether happy (positive) or sad (negative). Adolescents who experience depression experience cognitive distortions so they experience bias because they only remember negative feelings. Positive thinking can emerge after a week of feeling

emotions through writing. From this research, it can be seen that positive thinking occurs most often in subjects with severe levels of depression.

The expressive writing therapy procedure uses books, journals or personal books and blogs. Based on several studies, there are differences in the use of writing duration, because each case has a different level of problem depth, so different methods and duration are needed. The writing therapy process takes approximately 10 to 30 minutes for 3 or 5 days in the expressive writing process where the subject is asked to enter the room and is asked to write about how the subject uses his daily time and experiences in his life, about feelings for the people around him. , about the past, present, and dreams as well as personal conflicts experienced (Rahmawati, 2014).

## Method

This research is experimental research with a pretest and posttest design model. This experimental research was conducted to determine the effects of an intervention given deliberately by researchers to research subjects.

The experimental design used in this research is one group pretest and posttest design (Myres & Hansen, 2002). This design is to determine the effect of an intervention, the results of which are obtained by comparing the condition of a group before being given the intervention (pretest) with after being given the intervention (posttest).

The scale used is the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) with 10 question items which were developed by Cohen et al (1983). Which is widely used to assess stress levels in adolescents and adults aged 12 years and over. This scale evaluates the extent to which a person views life as unpredictable and uncontrollable. The participants in this research were 17 students in the city of Palembang who had a history of mild stress and difficulty expressing themselves.

## Results and Discussion

### DESCRIPTIVE TEST

#### Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest Stress	33.35	17	5.601	1.358
	Posttest Stress	29.53	17	3.710	.900

Based on the results of descriptive analysis, the average student pretest score = 33.35 and posttest = 29.53, this means that there was a reduction in stress for students in the city of Palembang after receiving emotional experience writing

therapy. Thus, it can be concluded that providing therapy to write emotional experiences to reduce stress has a significant effect on stress in students in the city of Palembang.

### HYPOTHESIS TEST (T TEST RESULTS)

#### Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					Significance			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
				Lower	Upper				
Pretest Stress - Posttest Stress	3.824	4.217	1.023	1.656	5.991	3.739	16	<.001	.002

The results of the t-test with paired samples test showed that there was a significant difference between pretest stress and posttest stress ( $t(14) = 3.739, p < 0.05$ ). The mean difference in stress scores was 3.824, and the 95% confidence interval for the difference was 1.656 and 5.991. These results show that stress levels decreased significantly after writing therapy. This shows that the intervention provided is effective in reducing stress levels in students in the city of Palembang.

### NORMALITY TEST

#### Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest Stress	.145	17	.200*	.952	17	.484
Posttest Stress	.139	17	.200*	.961	17	.650

\*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the output results above, it is known that the significant Shapiro-Wilk value for the pretest and posttest is greater than 0.05, so it can be concluded that the variables are normally distributed. The normality test is needed to determine whether the distribution of the data is normal or not with test criteria based on the significance obtained. Data is declared normally distributed if the significance value is  $> 0.05$  and data is declared not normally distributed if the significance value is  $< 0.05$ .

## Discussion

## 1. Stress in Students

Stress in students originates from several stressors or sources of stress, these sources of stress come from interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic and environmental problems (Musabiq & Karimah., 2018). Interpersonal problems come from conflicts with lovers, conflicts with friends, conflicts with family and misunderstandings. Meanwhile, intrapersonal problems include financial problems, responsibilities in campus organizations, difficulty managing time, health, body image that is not ideal, sick family members, and poor lifestyle. Academic activities are also a stressor for students, including lots of assignments, difficulty understanding courses, study plans that do not meet expectations, busy class schedules, and bad grades. The final source of stress for students is the environment. Stress that comes from this environment includes problems in the organization you are joining, an uncomfortable living environment, transportation, lack of vacation time, broken gadgets, and the weather.

The concept of stress was first introduced by Canon in 1929, then developed by Mayer in 1951. Literally stress can be interpreted as a condition that can trigger the emergence of negative emotions such as sadness, anger, disappointment, and can have an impact on the individual's physical and psychological condition as a form of anticipation of threats. Canon also analogizes stress as a form of "the fight-or-flight response". Canon explains that when an individual is stressed, he experiences physiological balance disorders. This condition causes a person to respond to their physiological symptoms with various certain behaviors as a form of self-defense (Covid- et al., 2021). The stress experienced by 60% of students is in the moderate category (Farmawati et al., 2022). If students do not overcome the stress-related problems they experience, they are at high risk of experiencing poor academic results or more serious mental health problems (Bulanda et al., 2020)

## 2. Writing Therapy in Positive Psychology to Reduce Stress Levels

Writing emotional experiences to help relieve various emotions that are down or agitated can be something that can be used as a therapeutic medium to reduce an individual's emotional lability. The writing technique that anxious writers need to pay attention to is to write and keep writing what they feel. The writing you create does not need to be edited first. This method will flow freely all the feelings that are still stuck in your heart. The important thing to do is if the content of the writing is dominated by negative feelings, it is also good to balance them with positive emotional experiences that have been present in the writer's life. Recalling positive emotional experiences will help create feelings of gratitude and positive ideas about our lives and future.

Various studies have shown that writing therapy can improve the immune system and reduce negative thoughts (Cooper, 2013). Different from writing in general, writing therapy is carried out based on certain steps and criteria, namely structured and routine, for example for 20 minutes in 3 to 5 consecutive days, and without therapist intervention. In this study, researchers conducted an intervention for 3 consecutive days with a total of 17 students in the city of Palembang. By writing down various life events and experiences for at least 20 minutes consecutively for three consecutive days, it can reduce various forms of negative emotions and have implications for improving health and coherence with a person's cognitive changes.

In positive psychology, writing therapy or also called Using Writing as Therapy or using writing as therapy, in its development, writing therapy contains narratives or events that are told; and plot - sequentially related events. Narratives in writing therapy provide an in-depth description of feelings and various experiences that a person experiences, even regarding very private or personal matters. The writing therapy model that is widely used in positive psychology studies is the emotional disclosure model (Cooper, 2013).

Summarizing the opinions of (Williamson & Wright, 2018) and (Hynes & Thompson), there are several indicators of writing therapy, including:

#### A. Expressive writing

Expressive writing is a form of writing therapy that is personal and emotional. The most effective thing when engaging in expressive writing is to openly acknowledge emotions. There are several stages in Expressive writing, including:

- 1) Recognition/Initial writing, is the opening stage before writing therapy. Not all individuals can easily write down their feelings expressively, so at this initial stage individuals need to be helped to focus their thoughts and imagination more, you can also start with relaxation to concentrate better. Then individuals can be helped to evaluate their mood.
- 2) Examination/writing exercise, this stage is the core stage of writing therapy, individuals are asked to write expressively about their feelings about certain situations. Usually this session lasts around 10-20 minutes. In this research, the subject's main topic in writing is indicators of muhasabah, for example remembering sins and mistakes. However, in this session individuals are not only asked to remember mistakes or sins, but rather to express their feelings honestly and specifically when they remember the incident, such as guilt, disappointment, sadness, or whatever. This session can be repeated with another muhasabah topic, and can change topics every day.

- 3) Juxtaposition/Feedback, this stage is also called the reflection stage. At this stage individuals are asked to re-read their writing and reflect on their feelings again. Individuals can also add to or correct their writing. Evaluating and correcting writing at this stage does not focus on the content or structure of the writing, but on emotions that may not yet appear. At this feedback stage, you can tell your writing to the counselor (if accompanied by a counselor) or you can do self-talk. The purpose of this stage is to reflect and validate the feelings expressed in the writing.
- 4) Application to the self, this stage is the last stage in the Expressive writing session. At this stage the individual's cognitive function begins to be reactivated, after in the previous stages the individual's emotions were more explored. Individuals are starting to be asked to integrate the knowledge and values they have with their emotional experiences to find out what needs to be changed or improved and maintained. For example, in this research, when the muhasabah indicator is about evaluating the quality of worship, or the indicator of understanding the various activities that have been carried out, at this stage individuals are asked to integrate with their understanding and knowledge of norms, so that they can make changes and improvements to their awareness. and their own desires.

#### B. Reflective writing

Reflective writing is a session in writing therapy that contains reflection and evaluation of the Expressive writing process that has been carried out. The Reflective writing stage aims to record what has been thought in the Expressive writing process that has been carried out previously. This reflective method can be used as a reinforcement or key to the writing therapy process that has been carried out. Individuals can be asked to write something or text related to their experience of the writing therapy they have carried out, for example feeling relieved and calm after carrying out the expressive writing process.

Or it can also be done by writing a different perspective from their previous writing, for example their reactive exploration of their experience from a wider perspective. Combining the Expressive writing and Reflective writing stages in writing therapy is a form of catharsis and cognitive reconstruction which is very effective in reducing stress levels. Both stress caused by unpleasant experiences in the past and caused by current stressors, even fear and worry about the future

Writing therapy can also be used as a form of catharsis and mindfulness (Petrovic et al., 2022). When research subjects carry out all the processes and stages of writing therapy, they are basically channeling the various negative emotions they feel. Apart from that, the mind, feelings and body are consciously focused on the writing process. This can reduce stress levels significantly because in the writing therapy process, research subjects experience a state of mindfulness or awareness and acceptance without judgment of the experiences they are experiencing at that time. For example, when the subject is exploring various past sins and mistakes, in this therapy the muhasabah process is directed at the process of repenting, forgiving oneself and implemented in motivation to make positive changes to oneself. This process will give rise to feelings of relief and calm, because increasing faith in Allah is the Most Forgiving will direct the subject to a process of self-forgiveness.

### **Conclusion**

The research results presented above are in accordance with previous research conducted by (Hatmanti & Rusdianingseh, 2019) that expressive writing can be used to reduce stress levels in students. Based on research that has been conducted and refers to previous research. This research proves that expressive writing can reduce the emotional experience of stress in students in the city of Palembang. Writing therapy on emotional experiences has a significant influence in reducing stress levels in students in Palembang City. This research uses an experimental approach with a pretest and posttest design, and uses the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) to assess the level of stress in research subjects. The results of the analysis showed a decrease in stress levels after the subjects received writing therapy, which was seen from the difference in average stress scores before and after the intervention.

In addition, expressive writing therapy is carried out through media such as books, journals, or blogs, with varying writing duration depending on the depth of the problems faced by the subject. The normality test results show that the data is normally distributed, and the t-test results show that there is a significant difference between stress scores before and after the intervention. This, it can be concluded that emotional experience writing therapy is effective in reducing stress levels in students in Palembang City, and this approach can be an effective alternative in dealing with stress in the student population.

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