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## The effect of expressive writing technique to stress level decrease of new student at Al-Falah Putri Islamic Boarding School, Margodadi, Tanggamus

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### ABSTRACT

Stress related to new learning environment is considered as a serious problem in the boarding education. Research showed the benefits of expressive writing on stress for new student in Islamic boarding school. Based on the Expressive Writing technique we designed Expressive writing training to reduce stress level and introduce mental health to new student. This study used quasi-experimental method with the design of one group pretest-posttest design. The training was held for five days with the number of respondents was 14 new students who had no experience in Islamic boarding schools before and still attending regular school in class VII MTS. Data was measured twice: the pretest and posttest used DASS-42 Stress Questionnaire. Bivariate analysis in this study used the Paired t Test. The results showed that all participants of the research program showed a decrease in stress after being given Expressive Writing intervention in new student. There was difference in stress level between pretest and posttest at 6,214 points. Expressive Writing therapy should be used as a treatment program that can be done to reduce stress on new students.

**Keywords:** Expressive Writing, Stress, Student, Therapy

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### INTRODUCTION

The new student is an early member that is registered at the Islamic boarding school and will only start to take part in the activities that will be held in the Islamic boarding school.

Students who learn in Islamic boarding schools do not only come from the area close to Islamic boarding school but also come from other cities in Lampung Province and other cities outside Lampung Province. When someone enters a new environment the problem will arise for the individual because of differences physical and social environment. Every individual who is faced with a new environment will make an effort to adjust (Handono&Bashori, 2013). Priyoto, 2014 states that the individual failure in adjustment can cause psychological disruption. WHO (2017) states that expressing mental health problems is very common and involves people from in all cultures and backgrounds. One of four people around the world will experience a mental health condition for the rest of their lives. Mental health disorder is estimated to cover 30% of the burden of non-fatal diseases and 10% of the overall burden of the disease, including death and disability. In America the results of a survey conducted online among 3,440 adults in the US showed that Americans feel depressed about the country's future (63%), money (62%) and employment (61%). When asked to think about the country and the specific issues that caused them stress, health care was the most frequently mentioned as many as 43% (APA, 2018). Based on data from Basic Health Research (2013), the prevalence of people suffering from mental emotional disorders in Indonesia was 6%. Sukadiyanto, 2010 in Azamand Abidin 2014 in their journal stated that every

individual has experienced depressed or tension, usually known as stress. According to Hasan, 2008 (in Azam and Abidin 2014), stress can cause damage to physiological functions. Physiological function such as stomach pain, arthritis, asthma and headaches. Psychological functions has chronic negative emotions such as anger, hostility, depression, anxiety, and aggressiveness. Individuals who experience stress are accompanied by increased anxiety and anger, always complaining, impatience, and always thinking negatively on things that happen around individuals (Baron & Byrne, 2010 in Azam and Abidin 2014). Research from Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) revealed that expressive writing can be useful for treating physical health as well as mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (or PTSD). Rahmawati, 2014 in her journal stated that expressive writing according to some sources means writing some expressions in the self to a book by narrating (Pennebaker, 1997). This expressive writing technique is basically both using media books, journals or personal diary books and blogs, with a duration of 15-20 minutes a day for three or four days. The things that can be written are about positive and negative experiences that will result in better learning and health. Whatever the topic is written, it is very important to explore objective experiences (that is, what happens) and those feelings. It writes about the deepest emotions. The important thing is try to find a room where you will not be disturbed by unwanted sounds, sights or smells (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). According to the expression of Al-Falah student administrator that many new students came out of the Islamic Boarding School. Among them, the santri reasoned that they were not at home and often had stomach or head aches, so they always went home and finally decided to leave the school. Researchers suspect that new student who often experiences pain and do not feel comfortable living in boarding schools because of stress that is caused by their new environment, so researchers conducted a pre-survey. The pre-survey research conducted in November 2017 at the Al-Falah Putri Islamic Boarding, Margodadi, Tanggamus Lampung in 17 new students by distributing the DASS-with 42 questionnaires with a grid of 14 items to determine the stress level of the santri, it showed the results of 2 students experienced very heavy stress level, 2 students experienced stress, 3 others experienced moderate stress, 6 people experienced mild stress levels and 2 others experienced no stress. Based on the descriptions above, the authors were interested in conducting a study of "The Effect of Expressive Writing Therapy on Decreasing the Stress Level of New Student at Al-Falah Putri, Margodadi, Tanggamus".

## METHODS

This research used a type of quantitative and qualitative research by analyzing the respondent's workbook. The design used in this study was quasi experimental with one group pretest-posttest design (Notoatmodjo, 2014). The measurement of the stress level of the new student before and after expressive writing therapy carried out by filling out the DASS-42 stress questionnaire with a statement of grid based on Damanik (2006) journal that has tested validity and reliability containing 14 items of statements, namely statement number 1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 18, 22, 27, 29, 32, 33, 35, 39. Expressive writing treatment is given according to the theory of Pannebaker and Smyth (2016) and based on the journal Fitria *et al* (2016) guidelines that have been modified by researchers into an expressive writing experiment module, namely intervention given for 5 days with a minimum writing duration of 15 minutes, distance of writing respondents  $\pm$  50 cm between respondents, language changes in expressive writing instructions adapted to student conditions. The topic written is about positive and negative experiences, writing is done in a comfortable and silent room. Expressive writing instructions are given as follows:

1. First day treatment
  - a. Please write down all the pleasant feelings, thought and experiences that you feel and think today.
  - b. Please write down all the unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and experiences that you feel and think today.
  - c. Please write down all the pleasant feelings, thoughts and experiences that you feel and think this week.
  - d. Please write down all the unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and experiences that you feel and think this week.
2. Second day treatment

- A. Please write down all the pleasant feelings, thought and experiences that you feel and think this month.
- B. Please write down all the unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and experiences that you feel and think this month.

Third day treatment

- A. Please write down all the pleasant feelings, thought and experiences that you feel and think this year.
- B. Please write down all the unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and experiences that you feel and think this year.

3. Fourth day treatment

- a. Silahkantulissemuaperasaan, pikiranandpengalamanmenyenangkanyang kalian rasakanandfikirkanselahidupini.

- A. Please write down all the pleasant feelings, thought and experiences that you feel and think in this life.
- B. Please write down all the unpleasant feelings, thoughts, and experiences that you feel and in this life.

5. Fifth day treatment

- a. Please write down the expectation based on experience that you have written.

The population in this study was 24 people. Of the 24 santri students, 14 were selected as respondents by the criteria: New students at the Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School in Tanggamus who entered in 2017, who experienced very mild stress, did not have a history of entering boarding schools before, and still in grade VII of Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The sampling technique in this study was purposive sampling. To test the effectiveness of the treatment given, statistical analysis was used using paired t test performed with the help of a computer

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1**

**The average score of student stress before and after performing expressive technique**

Stress Level	Mean	SD	Min	Max	95% CI
Before Intervention	18,79	3,662	15	27	16,67-20,90
After Intervention	12,57	3,662	7	16	11,07-14,07

Based on Table 1, the difference in stress level score before and after expressive writing techniques was 6.22. The lowest stress level score of respondents before being given the intervention was 15 that was included in the mild stress category and the highest stress level was 27 (heavy category). The stress level score of respondents after being given an intervention ranged from 7 (normal category) or did not experience stress to 16 (mild stress categories). The results of the interval estimation can be concluded that 95% were believed to be the average stress level experienced by student that was between 11.07-14.07.

**Table 2**

**The effect of expressive writing therapy on decreasing stress level of student**

Variable	Mean	SD	SE	p value	N
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Stress Level	6, 214	3,512	0,939	0,001	14
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The Results of Table2 showed that the difference in stress levels (dependent variable) before and after getting expressive writing therapy was obtained an average of 6.214 with SD 3,512. So that the results of the statistical test on the level of stress santri obtained  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , then from these results it can be concluded that rejected and accepted value that means it can be concluded that there was a decrease in stress levels after giving expressive writing therapy to students at the Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School, Margodadi, Tanggamus.

#### **The Stress Level on students after given expressive writing intervention**

Based on the results of the study, it can be seen that the average stress level of students before being given expressive writing therapy was 18.79. The lowest stress level was 15 that included mild stress and the highest stress level was 27 that was heavy. Pritaningrum and Hendriani (2013), revealed that changes that occur in boarding schools can cause stress, regulations and conditions in different dormitories at home can be a stressor and can lead to stress such as not being able to resist the discipline of boarding schools that are too tight, feeling bored with activities in boarding schools, conflicts with friends or teacher, not at home, unable to pay for school or dormitory, often sick and so on, so it needs the adjustment by individuals. Research from Handono and Bashori (2013) about self-adjustment and social support for environmental stress on new student of 46 students using populative techniques, it was found that the higher the level of adjustment and social support possessed by santri, the lower the stress of the environment or vice versa, the lower the level of adjustment and social support, the higher the environmental stress. According to the researchers, the stress experienced by new student was due to individual adjustments to the new environment, where there were conflicts with friends and differences in the activities of santri before boarding and after hospitalization, the dense schedule of daily activities and especially when doing 13-day research near Islamic boarding schools. so that respondents feel stressed and depressed.

#### **The Stress Level on students after given expressive writing intervention**

Based on the results of the study, it can be seen that the average stress level of students after being given expressive writing therapy was 12.57. The lowest stress level was 7 which include normal or not stress and the highest stress level was 16 that was mild stress. Pennebaker (dalam Fitria, 2016) revealed that the main value in writing is the ability to reduce restraints. Writing can be a place to distribute feelings and opinions that if it stored and have a negative impact on the body and mind. The effectiveness of expressive writing to reduce stress has been proven by Rahmawati (2014) research on children victims of domestic violence (domestic violence). Rahmawati conducted a study with subjects totaling two girls aged 9-11 years, in the results of her research stated that there was a decrease in stress levels after getting treatment in the form of expressive writing. According to researcher, a decrease in stress levels was caused after being given expressive writing therapy respondents felt relieved and felt better. In writing it is very necessary to have an individual focus on releasing and writing about the deepest emotions, so as to reduce the pressure felt.

#### **The effect of expressive writing therapy on decreasing student stress level at Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School Margodadi Tanggamus is qualitative**

On the results of the research conducted on 29 March-02 April 2018 on 14 students who experienced mild stress at the Al-Falah Putri Islamic Boarding School in Margodadi, Tanggamus, the decrease in stress levels of the new santri showed that the results of the statistical test were  $p = 0,000 < 0,005$  which means it was rejected and accepted, it can be concluded that there was a decrease in stress levels after giving expressive writing therapy to new santri at Al-Falah Putri Islamic Boarding School, Margodadi Tanggamus namely from an average value of 18.79 which included mild stress to 12.57 which includes normal or no stress. Pennebaker and Smyth (2016) revealed that expressive writing can be useful for treating physical health as well as mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress disorder (or PTSD). It was also revealed by Field and McCloskey (2016) that expressive writing could be the main therapy for the treatment of traumatic stress. This study supports the research conducted by Susilowati and Hasanat (2011) on the Effects of Emotional Experience

Writing Therapy on Decreasing Depression in First Year Students, Subjects in this study were 12 first-year students of the Faculty of Psychology, GadjahMada University with an age range of 18-19 years. Based on the implementation of therapy, from the ANOVA re-observation test to determine the decrease in depression pretest, posttest, and follow-up in the experimental group subjects, the F value = 33.72 and  $p = 0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ) that means there are differences in depression in each measurement of pretest, posttest, and follow-up. This shows a decrease in depression in each measurement. It has also been proven by Jan and Ron (in Pennebaker and Smyth 2016) that expressive writing experiments conducted for 20 minutes for 4 consecutive days on 25 students with instructions students must pour out their hearts. Collecting blood samples was done before therapy, after being given therapy, and six weeks after expressive writing therapy is then examined in the laboratory to determine the action of T-lymphocytes that play a role in the body's immunity. The conclusion of the research conducted by Jon and Ran, who wrote about the deepest thoughts and feelings about traumatic experiences has been shown to improve immune function compared to those who wrote about superficial topics. Although this effect is most pronounced after the last day of writing, it tends to last six weeks after the study. In addition, it was once again observed that health center visits for disease fell for people who wrote about trauma compared to those who wrote about trivial topics.

### Qualitative Analysis

This analysis is based on the story written by the subject on the workbook that has been shared. From this narrative analysis, it is known subject problems and behaviors and emotions that arise because of problems experienced by the subject. In this study, the topic written by the subject was conflicts with interactions with classmates and one pesantren (27%) such as: "I don't like him because he is feels smart ; Friends but why often gossiping ", problems with the opposite sex friend (10%) "I'm jealous if he smiles with other people; He neglected me this afternoon, really happy ", family problem (30%) "Missing my mother, father and sister ", conflict with myself (9%) "I am stupid ", conflict with boarding school officials and conflicts with regulations and activities boarding school (24%) "What ? ,pay fine again ; I already memorized 10 verses of JawanFiqh. " In this analysis also found negative words (anger, shame, hatred, resentment, evil, envy, etc.) as many as 561 words (44%) and and positive words (grateful, dear, love, beautiful, caring, etc.) 723 words (56%). Mukhlis (2016) states that gratitude is able to produce positive emotions and reduce anxiety which is the beginning of the emergence of stressful conditions on someone. Emotions or feelings that arise are manifested in a sentence like the following, angry "Watch out, I won't ask again!", Sad "Sad, want to go home ... miss mother", scared "I'm afraid later on if I don't know," despair "Don't feel at home, want to go home, it's not strong.", hatred "I'm really annoyed with Ms. room 10, very cynical", blaming others ", Feeling guilty" Sorry buk, I became a rebellious child with my family ", and feeling happy" I am happy to get a birthday present from my father ", grateful" Thank you Allah, today I got a good test score ", love" Thank you my love, I always love you ", and affection" Those who are always there for me, Shella, Nisa, and Invite me to love you ". After completing the therapy session for 5 days, it was found that 6 more students wrote negative experiences compared to positive experiences and as many as 8 more students wrote positive experiences compared to negative experiences. In accordance with the statement of Pennebaker& Smyth (2016) that the increase in positive words is considered as an improvement in health. However, Pennebaker& Smyth (2016) also reveals that whatever themes are written, the most important thing is how to let and explore the deepest emotions and thoughts. From this analysis it can also be seen that through expressive writing the subject can express experiences or feelings gotten so far, besides that the subject can also obtain an understanding of the problem he wrote. After giving the intervention, the interaction between students was also felt to increase, some subjects that were initially less close became closer, this can be seen from the beginning of the therapy session where between subjects did not talk much and after therapy went on the subject talked more with other subjects before and after the therapy session is done. Respondents also tended to show a relieved and happy face after 5 days of expressive writing therapy was completed. The subjects stated that after doing expressive writing therapy, their feelings became relieved and the burden they felt was reduced. Expressive writing is fun because it can express their emotions, it can be seen on an additional worksheet, some subjects write down other experiences or feelings outside the therapy session on an additional worksheet (the blank paper attached to the back of the workbook used by respondents if respondents want to write outside the therapy session, but it is not in the intervention counting).

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion of the study it can be concluded, that the difference in stress levels (dependent variable) before and after getting expressive writing therapy obtained an average of 6.214. The results of statistical tests on the stress level of the students had a significance value of  $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ , so that the results can be concluded that it was rejected and accepted. It means that it can be concluded that there is a decrease in stress levels after the expressive writing therapy for students in the Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School, Margodadi, Tanggamus.

Suggestions that can be given based on the results of the study are as follows:

### 1. For Islamic Boarding School

- a. Expressive writing therapy should be used as one of the treatments carried out by the pesantren in handling the stress of student
- b. For the Islamic boarding school it is expected to always pay special attention to the problems of the student. Support from surrounding people can improve santri's adjustment so that the perceived stress level will decrease.
- c. The security of the pesantren that must be improved is related to the complaints of student because there are items that are often lost.

### 2. For Students

You should always get used to expressive writing and try to express what is a burden of feeling and thought, even though it hurts, but openness or an expression can be a way of improving physical and mental health.

### 3. For Next Research

- a. The results of this study can be used as reference material for subsequent research related to expressive writing. In addition, the addition of subjects can be done as a comparison and conduct research on male subjects to determine the difference in the effect of expressive writing therapy.
- b. Respondents should be avoided from factors that can influence intervention / therapy such as family visits to students when given therapy.
- c. Perform expressive writing research using qualitative methods

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