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## COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING ON REDUCING STRESS, DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY LEVELS AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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### Abstract:

**Purpose:** This study aims to assess the impact of stress management training using SEFT module on reducing stress, anxiety and depression among high school students State Senior High School One in Kuantan Mudik Kuansing.

**Design:** This study employed a quasi-experimental study, specifically the One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design. **Method:** This study involved 30 high school students experiencing stress and anxiety who lack coping mechanisms. Utilizing the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), data was collected during a community service project. Prior to the intervention, participants completed a pre-test using the DASS Scale. Following this, students received stress management psychoeducation and SEFT therapy (Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique), after which a post-test was administered. **Findings:** The analysis revealed no significant differences in mean scores between pre- and post-intervention assessments on the stress, anxiety, and depression scales. **Significances:** This study suggests the implementation of a more intensive stress management program for school adolescents.

#### Keywords:

Psychoeducation, Depression, Stress, Anxiety and SEFT

## Introduction

In this age of upheaval, practically everyone has encountered stress. Even though it is a normal phenomenon, an individual who are unable to adjust to new demands or issues are more likely to feel stress (WHO 2023). In general, stress is a physical reaction generated by the human mind that occurs when people are under pressure, undergo rapid changes, or face risks that lead them to feel depressed. According to World Health Organization, WHO (2023), stress can be defines as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Everyone goes through periods of stress. But how we handle stress has a significant impact on our general wellbeing (WHO 2023).

Adolescence is described as a period of turmoil and storms that generate several challenges. Poor coping skills may develop more severe stress among adolescent, perhaps depression or anxiety if left untreated. The prevalence of psychological distress (PD) among Indonesian adolescent was 7.3%, with female adolescent has higher PD (8.1%) than male adolescent (6.2%) (Marthoenis & Schouler-Ocak, 2023). Older age, female gender, experiencing bullying three or more days per month, serious injuries, having suicidal thoughts or a plan, feeling hungry frequently or constantly, not eating fruit in the previous 30 days, and being sedentary are factors that independently increase the likelihood of Parkinson's disease (PD) ( $p < 0.005$ ) (Marthoenis & Schouler-Ocak, 2023).

Adolescence marks a pivotal stage between childhood and adulthood, characterized by profound changes in biology, cognition, and socioemotional development (Santrock, 2012; Rumini, 2000). During this transitional period, teenagers are particularly susceptible to psychological pressures, including stress, anxiety, and depression. Studies by the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2022) have highlighted the prevalence of stress among teenagers, with a notable increase in reported cases from 6% to 10% in recent years. Research conducted on Junior High School (SMP) students revealed alarming levels of stress, with significant proportions of students across different grades reporting high stress levels, ranging from 68% to 75%.

The current state of youth in Indonesia is concerning, characterized by a disregard for moral values and susceptibility to external influences (Trisnawati, 2014). Adolescence is often marked by emotional instability and sensitivity, making teenagers particularly vulnerable to maladaptive behaviors, including violence (Santrock, 2012). The Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) further underscores the magnitude of mental health issues among adolescents, reporting that one in three Indonesian youths and one in twenty adolescents have experienced a mental disorder in the previous year (Gloria, 2022). This translates to approximately 15.5 million and 2.45 million affected individuals, respectively. Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent, affecting 3.7% of teenagers, followed by major depressive disorder (1.0%) and behavioral disorders (0.9%). Despite the substantial burden of mental illness, only a small fraction of affected youth seeks professional help for their emotional and behavioral challenges (Siswanto, 2022).

Social challenges further compound the struggles faced by teenagers, as their still-developing minds and rapidly changing bodies navigate complex societal dynamics. Technological advancements have introduced new dimensions to social challenges, influencing adolescent interactions and communication patterns. Digital media, while offering connectivity, has also contributed to deficits in interpersonal communication skills among teenagers, exacerbating

mental and physical health issues. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a concerted effort from psychologists and psychological scientists. This study aims to contribute to this endeavor by investigating the impact of stress management training on high school students in Taluk Kuantan. By addressing the dysfunction caused by technology and the unique difficulties faced by teenagers, we aim to promote their well-being and meaningful contribution to society.

### **Literature Review**

The detrimental effects of stress extend beyond mere concern, often culminating in persistent anxiety that interferes with daily functioning (Fitria, 2018; Mutianingsih & Mustikasari, 2019; Thoyibah et al., 2020). Effective stress management becomes imperative in mitigating the impact of anxiety on individuals' lives. Individuals endowed with strong stress management skills can efficiently leverage resources to navigate mental health challenges, regulate stress-induced emotions, and cope with unforeseen events (Burla et al., 2019). However, unchecked stress and anxiety can escalate into debilitating conditions such as panic attacks and depression, underscoring the importance of proactive intervention (Keliat, 2013).

To address these concerns, it is essential to equip individuals, particularly adolescents, with effective coping strategies. Individualized treatment modalities, such as the Stress Management and Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT), offer promising avenues for empowering individuals to manage stress and anxiety effectively (Keliat, 2013). Stress management encompasses various strategies aimed at enhancing individuals' quality of life by equipping them with tools to recognize stressors, relax in stressful situations, cultivate positive thinking, and draw strength from spiritual resilience (Zulfa, 2020; Putri & Handayani, 2020).

By prioritizing stress management and equipping individuals with the necessary coping skills, we can not only alleviate individual suffering but also foster resilience and well-being at the societal and national levels. This proactive approach is crucial in addressing the pervasive impact of stress and anxiety on individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole.

Aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a stress management intervention, including sessions focused on recognizing stressors, relaxation techniques, positive thinking strategies, and spiritual resilience, in reducing stress and anxiety levels among high school students. We hypothesize that there are significant differences before and after SEFT intervention among State Senior High School One in Kuantan Mudik Kuansing students.

### **Method**

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experiment research design. It was conducted at State Senior High School One in Kuantan Mudik Kuansing. The population of students in this school is approximately 660. Before the commencement of the study, teachers selected students with low academic performance suspected of having psychological-related issues. In this study, a total of 30 students were selected to participate. These students were briefed about the study and provided with an information sheet and an informed consent form to be signed by their parents or guardians. Only students whose parents or guardians consented were allowed to participate. After one week, the researchers returned to the school to collect consent forms. As a result, all 30 students proposed by the teachers were granted permission by their respective parents or guardians to participate.

On intervention days, students were gathered in a hall accompanied by a supervising teacher and the researcher during the intervention program. The students underwent psychoeducation sessions focusing on stress management techniques. All stress management methods utilized the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) module developed by the researcher. Following the intervention briefing, students were administered the adopted DASS-21 test for the pre-test measurement. After completing the DASS-21 test, all 30 students participated in the intervention session conducted by the researcher and qualified speakers trained in SEFT.

For the post-test assessment, the researcher returned to the school with 30 sets of DASS-21 tests. Teachers were informed in advance about this follow-up assessment during the initial session. The time interval between the pre-test and post-test was seven days. On the post-test assessment days, all students involved were assembled in a hall. Subsequently, students filled out the DASS-21 forms and returned them to the researcher. All data were then entered into IBM SPSS software version 25, and paired sample t-tests were conducted for analysis.

## Research Design

### *Pre test Post test*

R.	O1	X.	O2
R.	O2	X.	O2

Key:

X = Treatment

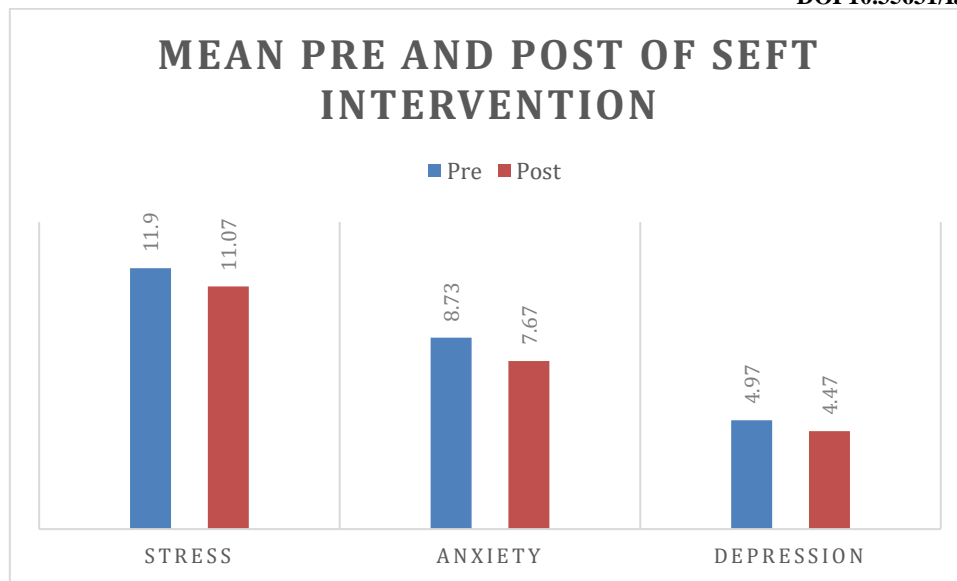
O1 = Pre test

O2 = Post test

R = Randomize

## Result

Figure 1 below depicts the graph showing the mean differences for stress, anxiety, and depression among students participating in this study. It was found that the mean for stress at pre-intervention was  $M = 11.9$ ,  $SD = 6.83$  and the mean at post-intervention was  $M = 11.07$ ,  $SD = 7.57$ . For anxiety, the mean pre-intervention was  $M = 8.73$ ,  $SD = 5.45$ , while the mean post-intervention was  $M = 7.67$ ,  $SD = 4.99$ . Finally, the mean for depression at pre-intervention was  $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 4.25$  while the mean post-intervention was  $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 3.72$ . Overall, there was a decrease in the mean for stress, anxiety, and depression with the change in mean ranging between 0.5-1.06.



**Figure 1: Mean Pre And Post of SEFT Intervention**

**Table 1: T-test Result.**

Parameters	Pre		Post		t(29)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Stress	11.90	6.83	11.07	7.57	0.4473	0.585	0.115
Anxiety	8.73	5.45	7.67	4.99	0.7893	0.895	0.202
Depression	4.97	4.25	4.47	3.72	0.4845	0.511	0.125

Paired sample t-tests were conducted to assess the mean differences before and after SEFT intervention on this sample of students. The results indicated no significant difference for stress before and after SEFT intervention,  $t(29) = 0.4473$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Additionally, there was no significant difference for anxiety before and after SEFT intervention,  $t(29) = 0.7893$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Finally, there was no significant difference for depression before and after SEFT intervention,  $t(29) = 0.4845$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

### Discussion

There are many methods for managing stress, anxiety, and depression. Among the well-known treatment methods are Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance Therapy, and Solution Focused Therapy. Previous studies have shown that these treatments successfully reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Seven studies have found that CBT can reduce symptoms of anxiety among school students, but the effectiveness is mild (Tse et al., 2023).

Matthys & Schutter (2021) have suggested psychoeducation group sessions among children and adolescents to address issues of anger and problem-solving skills. Taking this suggestion into account, the researchers applied the SEFT treatment module using psychoeducation medium on school students in this study. Findings indicate that although there were minimal differences before and after treatment, these mean differences were not significant. Various reasons may contribute to this, such as the retest interval being too close. According to Creswell

& Creswell (2022), the retest interval should take a few weeks or months, depending on the intervention goals, existing evidence, and practical constraints. This allows treatment recipients to internalize the treatment methods learned from therapists. Additionally, delivering treatment in overly large groups, as in this study sample, can lead to clients being unable to fully understand and engage with the taught techniques. Therefore, delivery methods using smaller groups, such as 8-10 individuals per group, could be implemented to ensure more effective treatment delivery. If there are clients who have difficulty adjusting in larger groups, individual treatment methods may need to be implemented. Fawcett et al. (2020) found that although there were no significant differences in individual vs. group therapy outcomes, adolescents generally preferred individual therapy sessions more than group therapy sessions.

The SEFT module also only emphasizes a few techniques for stress reduction. The Emotion Freedom Technique was taught to the study sample to practice during simulation sessions throughout the treatment period. During simulations, the researchers taught positive self-suggestion techniques in a spiritual form to this sample. The use of these brief techniques is expected to be practical for students in schools because school students are usually busy with various academic tasks. However, the results of this study indicate that these brief techniques were not effective for the students. This may be because the students may not know how to integrate pressure techniques at specific centers on the body with positive spiritual words even though they were shown how. A systematic review studying brief interventions (stress management, relaxation, massage, mindfulness meditation, or multimodal intervention) on mental health issues in organizations also showed no evidence of effectiveness (Ivancic et al., 2017). However, a recent systematic review conducted by Kriakous et al. (2021) showed the opposite results. Kriakous et al. (2021) found that the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) technique is effective in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress but not effective for burnout and resilience cases. Therefore, this study needs to update treatment methods and treatment delivery in the SEFT module, validate the content by experts, and test the SEFT module on various groups and age levels to ensure its reliability.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that psychoeducation methods alone are not sufficient to effectively reduce the effects of stress, anxiety, and depression among school students. The objective of this study was to determine whether there was a decrease in stress, anxiety, and depression scores after intervention through psychoeducation using the SEFT module, but the analysis showed insignificant results. This study suggests that a large-group treatment approach, using only psychoeducation methods and without follow-up sessions, does not have any effect on stress, anxiety, and depression among school students. Therefore, individual or smaller group treatment approaches, using proven effective treatments such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, along with follow-up sessions, are necessary to ensure that clients truly benefit from the treatment provided. However, this study has several limitations that need to be addressed in the future. First, the study only used a one-group pre-and-post-test design, and the time interval between pre-and-post-tests was only one week. Furthermore, there are also no subsequent treatment procedure. Therefore, this study lacks data to assess the effectiveness of the SEFT module over a longer period. Additionally, this study did not have a control group. Therefore, the effectiveness of the module needs to be further examined using a control group to enhance its reliability. This study also only used samples from high school students in one district in Riau, Indonesia. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted in other districts or provinces in Indonesia. Furthermore, the use of more reliable and comprehensive assessment

tools such as the Beck Depression Inventory-II or Beck Anxiety Inventory is also necessary to ensure more accurate measurements.

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