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The Effectiveness of Writing Therapy and the POS-JARI Method in Reducing Anxiety among Students at SMPN 1 Kromengan

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Anxiety is a common mental health problem among adolescents that may impair learning concentration and academic performance. A 2025 mental health screening at SMPN 1 Kromengan found a 15.43% prevalence of anxiety among eighth-grade students. This community service activity aimed to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of Expressive Writing Therapy and the "POS-JARI" method (educational poster and five-finger hypnosis) in reducing students' anxiety levels. The target participants were 70 eighth-grade students identified as experiencing anxiety based on a pretest using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS), divided into a Writing Therapy group (35 students) and a POS-JARI group (35 students). Writing Therapy was conducted for three consecutive days, while POS-JARI was delivered once through poster education and five-finger hypnosis relaxation. The Independent Samples T-Test on the gain scores showed a significant difference in effectiveness (p=0.000), with the mean anxiety-score reduction in the Writing Therapy group (11.11) far exceeding that of the POS-JARI group (1.43). It is concluded that Writing Therapy is more effective than the POS-FINGER method in reducing anxiety levels among eighth-grade students, and can be considered a simple and sustainable self-coping strategy in the school setting.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial transition phase from childhood to adulthood, characterized by significant emotional dynamics, making it vulnerable to mental health disorders. Globally, an estimated 14% of adolescents aged 10–19 experience a mental health condition, with anxiety being a major contributor to the burden of disease (Maulidiya et al., 2024). A 2025 mental health screening at SMPN 1 Kromengan showed a prevalence of anxiety of 15.43% among students, with both mild and severe categories. Untreated anxiety can disrupt concentration, reduce motivation, and negatively impact students' academic performance.

As a treatment effort, a combination of non-pharmacological interventions was chosen in the form of Writing Therapy (expressive writing therapy) as a medium for emotional catharsis, as well as the "POS-JARI" method (educational posters and 5-finger hypnosis) to trigger physical and cognitive relaxation responses (Arviani & Rachman, 2024; Harianja, 2024). The activity targets eighth-grade students because this group is in an academic transition position that is vulnerable to the accumulation of cognitive burden and academic anxiety.

This activity is a development of the "CERIA" program previously implemented on ninth-grade students at the same school (Nafadiaz et al., 2026). Although the program showed a significant reduction in anxiety (p=0.000), previous research has not specifically explained the level of effectiveness of each type of intervention. Therefore, this community diagnostic activity aims to directly compare the effectiveness of Writing Therapy with the POS-JARI method to obtain the most efficient intervention strategy in reducing student anxiety levels.

SMPN 1 Kromengan is located in Ngadirejo Village, Kromengan District, Malang Regency, which is the working area of the Kromengan Community Health Center. Based on the Kromengan Community Health Center registration data in 2025, mental health issues have not been a top priority, even though the results of mental health screening at SMPN 1 Kromengan in 2025 on 337 students showed that 39 students (11.57%) experienced mild anxiety and 13 students (3.86%) experienced severe anxiety. In the 2026 re-screening of 188 grade VIII students (grades 8A–8F), 22 students were found to have mild anxiety, 25 students had moderate anxiety, and 23 students had severe anxiety.

The causes of the high anxiety rate can be traced through a fishbone diagram approach that divides the causal factors into six dimensions, namely individuals (trauma history, shy personality, lack of self-confidence), family (harsh parenting, academic demands, broken family), school (exam pressure, lack of counseling role of guidance counseling, bullying), peers (difficulty in socializing, conflict, fear of group rejection), environment and media (excessive exposure to social media, negative information, unhealthy friendships), and physical health (lack of sleep, lack of physical activity), which are in line with the risk factors for adolescent anxiety in the school environment, family, and personality (Putra et al., 2024).

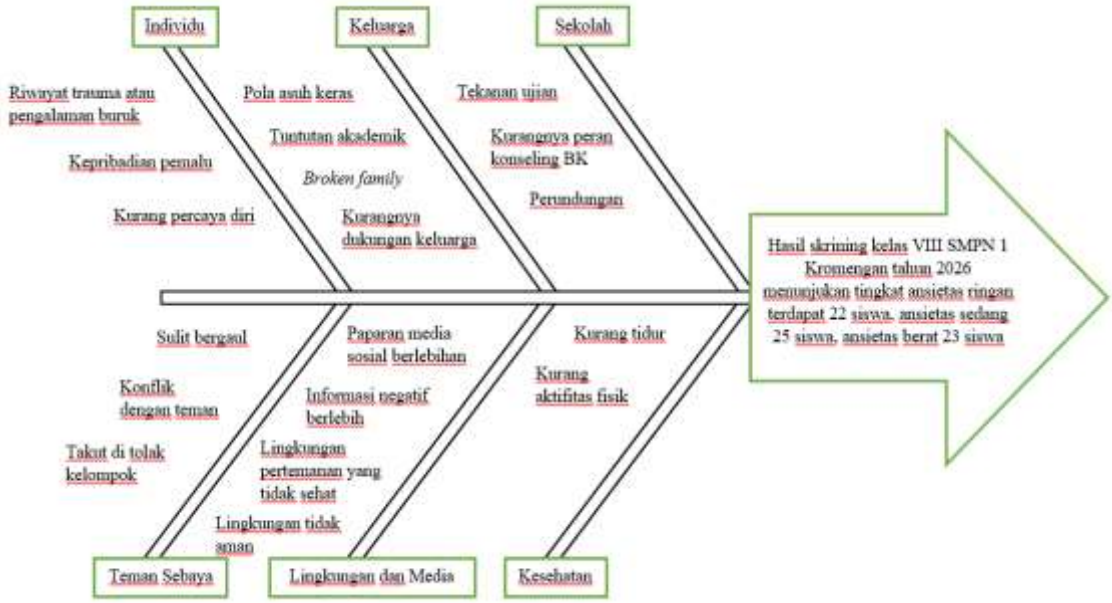


Figure 1. Fishbone Diagram of the Causes of High Anxiety in Class VIII Students of SMPN 1 Kromengan

Based on the determination of problem priorities using the USG (Urgency, Seriousness, Growth) method carried out together with the Community Health Center and the school, the incidence of anxiety in class VIII students was determined as the main priority to be immediately addressed through promotive and preventive mental health activities in the school environment.



Figure 2. Implementation of Screening and Intervention for Class VIII Students of SMPN 1 Kromengan

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHOD

The activity was carried out using a two-group pretest-posttest design. The target of the activity was 188 eighth-grade students of SMPN 1 Kromengan in the 2025/2026 academic year, with a sample of 70 students identified as having anxiety (mild, moderate, or severe) based on a pretest using the Indonesian version of the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) questionnaire. The sampling technique used non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach.

The sample was divided equally into two intervention groups, namely 35 students in the Writing Therapy group and 35 students in the POS-JARI method group. The Writing Therapy group was given an expressive writing intervention for three consecutive days with a duration of 20–30 minutes per session, including writing about traumatic experiences (the first day), happy experiences (the second day), and greatest aspirations (the third day). The POS-JARI group was given education through poster media regarding the definition, symptoms, and causes of anxiety, followed by 5-finger hypnosis relaxation for ± 10 minutes accompanied by relaxation music.

Measurement of anxiety levels was conducted before (pretest) and after (posttest) the intervention using the HARS questionnaire consisting of 14 symptom items with a score of 0–4, so that the total score ranges from 0–56 which is categorized as no anxiety, mild, moderate, severe, and very severe (panic). Data analysis was carried out univariately to describe the characteristics of the respondents, and bivariately using the Shapiro-Wilk normality test on the gain score, followed by the Independent Samples T-Test to compare the effectiveness between the two intervention groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The activity began with a pretest screening using the HARS questionnaire on 188 eighth grade students, resulting in 70 students who met the inclusion criteria as an indicator of achieving the activity's objectives, namely identifying all students with mild, moderate, or severe anxiety to subsequently receive intervention. This activity involved 70 respondents who were predominantly 14 years old (80.0% in the Writing Therapy group and 82.9% in the POS-JARI group) and female (71.4% in both groups). In the pretest measurement, all respondents were identified as having anxiety, with the largest proportion in the moderate category in the Writing Therapy group (37.0%) and a balanced proportion between the mild and moderate categories in the POS-JARI group (34.3% each).

Table 1. Comparison of Pretest-Posttest Anxiety Levels and Gain Scores of the Two Intervention Groups

Category	Writing Therapy (n=35)	POS-JARI (n=35)
Mild Anxiety (Pretest)	11 (31.5%)	12 (34.3%)
Moderate Anxiety (Pretest)	13 (37.0%)	12 (34.3%)
Severe Anxiety (Pretest)	11 (31.5%)	11 (31.4%)
Normal (Posttest)	22 (62.9%)	7 (20.0%)
Mild Anxiety (Posttest)	5 (14.3%)	7 (20.0%)
Moderate Anxiety (Posttest)	2 (5.7%)	11 (31.4%)
Severe Anxiety (Posttest)	6 (17.1%)	10 (28.6%)
Mean Gain Score	11,1143	1.4286

Table 1 shows that the activity's success benchmark, namely a decrease in anxiety levels from pretest to posttest, was achieved in both groups, but with different results. The Writing Therapy group experienced a very high increase in the normal category, from 0% at pretest to 62.9% at posttest, far exceeding the POS-JARI group, which only increased to 20.0%. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test on the gain score showed that the data were normally distributed in both groups ($p>0.05$), so it was continued with an Independent Samples T-Test.

Table 2. Results of the Independent Samples T-Test on the Effectiveness of Gain Score on Anxiety Levels between the Two Intervention Groups

Variables	t value	*df*	*Sig.(2-tailed)*	Information
Gain Score Anxiety	-4,662	68	0,000	Significant ($p < 0.05$)

Table 2 shows the results of the t-value test = -4.662 with $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), which proves a significant difference in effectiveness between the two interventions. The average gain score of Writing Therapy (11.1143) is much higher than POS-JARI (1.4286), so Writing Therapy is declared more effective in reducing students' anxiety levels.

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test in the Writing Therapy group showed that all respondents (100%) experienced a significant decrease in anxiety scores ($p = 0.000$), while in the POS-JARI group only 13 out of 35 respondents experienced a decrease in scores and this was not statistically significant ($p = 0.185$). The main advantage of Writing Therapy lies in its role as an emotional catharsis medium that helps adolescents understand themselves deeply through a process of recognition, examination, juxtaposition, and application that lasts for three days (Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016). The writing process helps restructure negative thoughts into more organized ones, thus supporting the function of the prefrontal cortex in regulating emotions and suppressing maladaptive responses of the amygdala (Sadock et al., 2017; Alipour et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, a weakness of the POS-JARI method identified in this activity is that the intervention is only carried out once, so its effects are more about

temporarily reducing somatic and autonomic manifestations through distraction and parasympathetic relaxation responses (Harianja, 2024), rather than deeply unraveling the root of emotional problems. Furthermore, the ability to accept relaxation suggestions varies from individual to individual due to personal neurobiological and psychological factors (Alipour et al., 2025), so not all respondents obtain optimal relaxation effects from this technique. The shorter duration of the intervention in the POS-JARI group compared to Writing Therapy also contributed to the difference in effectiveness of the results obtained (Apriyandi, 2023).

The level of difficulty in implementing this activity was mainly found in coordinating the time of the Writing Therapy implementation which required three consecutive days so that it was vulnerable to student absences, as well as limited space and rest time during the implementation of 5-finger hypnosis relaxation between class hours. Opportunities for future activity development include equalizing the duration and frequency of providing both interventions for a more accurate comparison of effectiveness, expanding the target to all eighth grade students, and institutionalizing Writing Therapy as a routine Guidance and Counseling (BK) program supported by educational poster media as a complement.

This finding complements the limitations of the previous "CERIA" program which did not differentiate the effectiveness of each type of intervention (Nafadiaz et al., 2026), and strengthens promotive and preventive efforts for adolescent mental health in accordance with the direction of early detection recommended by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2025) and the World Health Organization (2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This community diagnostic activity showed that Writing Therapy was significantly more effective than the POS-JARI method in reducing anxiety levels among eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kromengan. The Writing Therapy group demonstrated a higher average gain score of 11.1143 compared to 1.4286 in the POS-JARI group ($p = 0.000$). All respondents in the Writing Therapy group experienced a decrease in anxiety scores, whereas the POS-JARI group did not demonstrate statistically significant changes.

These findings indicate that Writing Therapy can serve as an effective, accessible, and practical non-pharmacological approach to helping adolescents manage anxiety. Through structured writing activities, students are encouraged to express their emotions, identify sources of stress, and develop greater self-awareness. This process may help them manage negative thoughts and emotional difficulties in a healthier way.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of integrating mental health promotion into school-based community health programs. Collaboration between SMPN 1 Kromengan, the Kromengan Community Health Center, teachers, and school counselors is essential to creating a supportive environment that encourages students to communicate their emotional difficulties without fear of judgment.

Therefore, Writing Therapy is recommended as a complementary school-based intervention for promoting adolescent mental health. Educational posters can also be used to reinforce mental health awareness and provide students with accessible information about anxiety management. However, continued evaluation is necessary to determine the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the intervention.

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