

THE USE OF CREATIVE WRITING AS A WAY TO CURE HUMAN'S DEPRESSION DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

Most people who suffer from the pandemic currently stay at home and are not productive at all. Sometimes it becomes a burden and in the end there will be damage to people's mental health. The common mental illness is depression. One of the alternatives to cure depression is using creative writing. Creative writing is known as free writing that is full of arts and focused on entertaining the readers. The main reason why creative writing can help people with depression is because it is considered as self-expressive of the writer itself. The purpose of this paper is to identify whether creative writing is able to cure human's depression or not. Moreover, a few ideas on how writing might help against depression are: 1) always appreciate our writing, 2) not only words, but also art 3) write about what you love. The result showed that creative writing was possible to cure human's depression during this pandemic. The finding showed that there were obstacles in proving whether creative writing was the best solution or not to help human's depression.

Keywords: *creative writing, human's depression, the pandemic*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

COVID-19 pandemic is such a big disaster for all of society in this world. It affects different people in different ways. Most people may experience depression while they can't socialize outside during their quarantine days. Writing is one of the ways to exchange people's thoughts and deep feeling into the shape of written text in order to reduce people's stress (Pennebaker, 2008). Nowadays, creative writing is becoming the chosen one to release people's sick of their mental health. As we know, there are many types of creative writing itself. We often find them as writing a novel, short story, fiction, poems, or even poetry. Moreover, Cousins in Macdonald (2004) stated that creative writing was possible to gain a sense of well-being, because people could write anything about their experiences of life and it is useful to

reduce their stress and also lighten up their mood. Furthermore, Kaufman & Kaufman (2009) said that this writing therapy facilitates people to change their cognitive, regulates their emotional to be the better one, gets the new energy, and makes a better decision for their upcoming plans and behaviors.

A number of previous studies have been carried out in this field, few of them will be explained briefly below.

There was a study conducted by Setyoadi (2014) entitled *Pengaruh Terapi Creative Writing Humors Terhadap Penurunan Stres Pada Orang Dengan HIV/AIDS (ODHA) Di LSM Sadar Hati* that mainly discuss about the effect of creative writing for reduce stress in ODHA at LSM Sadar Hati. Sadly, it revealed that creative writing is not effective for reducing stress in ODHA, but it may be effective if it is conducted with a group method. There were some suggestions to conduct the next research that this therapy need some fix in a procedure, examples creative writing humors therapy will be effective if did with grouping method, because with grouping method ODHA can get a feedback from others and related conditions of the samples need to be fixed again especially for criteria of inclusion and exclusion, that are the samples who will join in this therapy must be capable for writing, still have sense of humor, and not in crisis conditions.

Another study that similar with the topic was conducted by Kusuma (2018) entitled *Pengaruh Expressive Writing Therapy Terhadap Penurunan Depresi, Cemas, dan Stres pada Remaja* which mainly discuss about the effect of expressive writing itself in decreasing teen's mental health. The result found that expressive writing is useful to cure depression from the youth generation and suggest that expressive writing therapy is used as an intervention in the treatment of depression, anxiety, and stress in adolescents who are undergoing the process of social rehabilitation. According to Kusuma (2018), expressive writing therapy is one of intervention shaped as cognitive psychotherapy that is able to cure people's depression.

Riddwan (2018) also conducted research that was similar to this topic. The title of the research is *Terapi Menulis dalam Meningkatkan Self Confidence Seorang Mahasiswi Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya*. The researcher provided a discussion about whether writing therapy could affect student's self-confidence or not. In the counseling process the counselor uses three stages in writing therapy, namely recognition / initial writing, examination / writing exercise, juxtaposition / feedback and application to self where by undergoing these stages it is hoped that the counselee will be able to make the counselee aware

of the nature of the problems he is facing. It revealed that this study was successful because 81% of the symptoms were gone.

Moreover, there was a study conducted by Akhtarul., et al (2020) which investigated the University student's depression and anxiety during the pandemic. There was no discussion about writing, but this one is considered as an alternative to know more about mental health issues that happen during the pandemic. The title of the study was *Depression and anxiety among university students during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh: A web-based cross-sectional survey*. Based on this study, there was evidence that the cause of student's depression and anxiety probably come from many aspects, such as financial condition and academic lack. The on-going Covid-19 apparently created chaos as countries have been reported among its citizens, that chaos included the damage on people's emotion (Gritsenko., et al, 2020). The result showed that students were experiencing heightened depression and anxiety. The large percentage was found as the first evidence that proves Bangladeshi's students have been suffering from depression and anxiety symptoms. It concludes that the study was successful because in the end the researcher knows that the effect of this pandemic really affects student's mental health.

Furthermore, this study addresses one main research question about the keywords provided. The concern is whether creative writing is possible to cure human's depression or not during this pandemic. Therefore, in achieving this goal, the role of creative writing needs to be more developed and conducted to cure people's depression, especially during this pandemic.

METHOD

In this research, the method used is library research. Library research is a study that is used as a collective information with the help of any material such as a document, book, journal, thesis, and many more (Nazir, 1988). The procedure of this research is to arrange concepts about creative writing itself according to its development to cure human's depression during a pandemic. It also can be a practical guide for further research. The data collection of this research is secondary data that come up from a few article journals, internet sites, and thesis. Those data were collected through documentation, which means that the data were found from some sources. Moreover, the technique of data analysis that is used in this research is content analysis. Content analysis refers to choose, compare, combine, and classify any information until the relevant study be found.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are many studies that have been collected for this research. The researchers have found four cases that are similar to this topic and mainly discuss writing and the mental health issues. Therefore, those can be the alternatives to conduct the next research.

The first study was conducted by Setyoadi (2014) that research about the effects of creative writing therapy for people with HIV/AIDS in order to release their stress. The method used here was a quasi-experiment with one group pretest-posttest design. The population of this research were people in LSM Sadar Hati Malang which has 17 respondents. Sampling technique used was purposive sampling means that take all of the population which match with the inclusive criteria. Those criteria were; ODHA should be able to read and write, ODHA that cooperative with others, ODHA that humorous. The instrument used here simple tools that used by the researcher, such as notebook, pen, references of written story, checklist therapy, demographic sheet, depression anxiety stress scales (DASS), and questionnaire. This questionnaire composed of 14 questions. The research also classifies the sample with ages, gender, education, profession, income, positive diagnosis and their interest in writing activity.

Based on the result in this study, the average score of writing frequency that done by the respondents were low. The cause of that matter was extremely variative because writing ability was influenced by some things such as their cognitive abilities and health issues (Jose et al., 2007; Swann, 2009). Not all of the respondents showed a decrease in stress, as much as 21% experienced an increase and 6% had a fixed stress score. The results of statistical tests showed that the p value $(0.053) > 0.05$, although there was a decrease in stress scores by an average of 2.88, the effect of creative writing humor therapy on the reduction in stress scores of ODHA was less significant, this indicates that H_0 failed. rejected. The insignificance of this study after being analyzed was due to several factors, including some ODHA taking stories from the internet, a lack of writing frequency, and possibly a lack of quality in sharing stories with their closest people. Therefore, the researcher has concluded that creative writing humor is not effective for reducing stress in ODHA.

Next study was conducted by Kusuma., et al (2018) that aimed to determine the effect of expressive writing therapy to decrease depression, anxiety, and stress in adolescents in a social rehabilitation center PSMP Antasena Magelang. The method used was a true experimental pretest-posttest with control group design and with a sample of 25 people for the treatment group and 25 for the control group. The sampling technique used was a random

sampling that focused on teens that have mental health issues such as depression, stress, anxiety, and many more. The treatment group was given expressive writing therapy for 5 meetings a week. Meanwhile, the control group was still given treatment in the form of supportive group therapy that was already running in the orphanage. This study used the DASS 42 (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale 42) instrument consists of 42 questions regarding the negative emotional status of depression, anxiety, and stress, each of which uses a Likert scale by selecting one of the answers, namely never, sometimes, often, and always.

There are many studies that already investigate that our youth generation nowadays have many complex problems about their life and it has potential to affect their behavior also (Lubis, 2017). Depression itself refers to a time when people feel sick about their deep-heart, they often feel sad for many reasons (Kaplan, Saddock, & Grabb,2010). However, writing activity has a role to decrease the burdensome in their thoughts. Therefore, the conclusion of this study is expressive writing therapy can be used to reduce depression, anxiety and stress in adolescents who are undergoing the process of social rehabilitation.

Another study conducted by Riddwan (2018) which aimed to know the possibility of writing therapy as an alternative to decrease a self-confidence issue. The method used in this research was descriptive-qualitative and in persistence used the case study one. The participant of this research is a Malaysian student named Dayang Nurfarahain that could not encourage herself in improving self-confidence alongs with her depression because of her poor past. There was a counselor that helped her through this problem. In short, counselors have been involved in Dayang's daily activities in order to observe her thoughts or her feelings instead. Therefore, with this observation, the data collected will be complete including Dayang's real condition, her background, and also her environment. Data analysis used in this study was descriptive-qualitative which processed through some steps until it was clear enough to be analyzed. The instruments used in this study were observation, interview, and documentation.

According to Pennebaker (1997), translation of bitter experiences in a language writing will be able to change the way of someone's thinking. Expressive Writing provides opportunities for individuals to express their feelings and emotions in the form of the use of words conveying in social interactions, after that in the delivery of these emotions will be increased the improvements in relationship stability. Therefore, the final conclusion of this study was success with the big change of the sample's self. Dayang has now become a better version of herself because of writing therapy which she always did.

The last study was conducted by Akhtarul., et al (2020) which aimed to investigate the prevalence of depression and anxiety among Bangladeshi University students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was used in a survey study which has the students of Bangladeshi University as the target population. Questionnaire was provided to measure the population's basic information, depression, and anxiety. Since the study conducted during the pandemic, an online-based platform was used to distribute the questionnaire. The sampling technique used was snowball sampling technique. It used to compile student's information. An informed consent form was attached to the e-questionnaire, and each participant consented to participate in the survey after reading the consent form. The results showed that; 392 (82.4%) students were found to have mild to severe depressive symptoms, and 389 (87.7%) students were found to have mild to severe anxiety symptoms, out of the total 476 valid participants, 392 (82.4%) were found to have mild to severe depressive symptoms, students who thought that s/he was lagging behind others in academic activities were 1.8 times (95% CI: 1.098, 2.935) more likely to be depressed than the student with no such worries. The findings of the web-based cross-sectional survey indicate that more than two-thirds of the students were experiencing mild to severe depression (82.4%) and anxiety (87.7%).

The conclusion that was found by the researcher was despite the limitations, the pandemic is real and it makes Bangladeshi University students must suffer from depression and anxiety. Blustein (2019) also stated that apparently, the sudden situation that brings up the students into the weak financial condition may affect their daily routine, more into their social-life and their mental health. In addition, those economic matters that happen to the students should be considered as a serious matter from the government, along with the university.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The study finally gained a conclusion based on several studies that have already been reviewed. According to this study's topic which mainly discusses the effect of creative writing in curing human's depression during pandemic, most of the previous studies above presented a significant result. There was proof that writing activity is possible to decrease the amount of people who have depression. Although there were also many types of writing, such as expressive writing which focused on writing about people's experiences or personal writing which focused on personal expression as a healing-tool to reduce depression and anxiety.

Completion of this study raises some suggestions that apparently have to be considered among the parties involved. Covid-19 pandemic, that we don't know when it will end, is such a big trouble that it has affected citizens in every country. Therefore, to minimize the growing mental health issues because of this pandemic, the government should work together with every level of society to create better surroundings, to find the best solution, and to maintain their own selves to be free from any impact of Covid-19 including depression.

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