



## BIBLIOTHERAPY IN REDUCING DEPRESSION TENDENCIES IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT/ABSTRAK:

*College students are particularly susceptible to depression due to the various pressures. Therefore, bibliotherapy is one of the interventions that can be utilized to alleviate this situation. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in reducing the tendency of depression among students. The participants in this pre-experimental study with a one-group pretest-posttest design consisted of college students who experienced depression and had an interest in reading (N=7). The results of the Wilcoxon test showed a decrease in depression symptoms after students received bibliotherapy intervention. This study was expected to serve as a valuable self-help reference for students struggling with depression.*

Mahasiswa merupakan salah satu kelompok yang rentan mengalami kecenderungan depresi karena berbagai tekanan yang dihadapi. Salah satu intervensi yang dapat dilakukan mahasiswa yang mengalami kecenderungan depresi adalah bibliotherapy. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bibliotherapy efektif dalam menurunkan kecenderungan depresi pada mahasiswa. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa yang mengalami kecenderungan depresi dan memiliki minat baca (N=7). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode *pre-experimental* dengan one group pretest-posttest design. Hasil Uji Wilcoxon menunjukkan bahwa terdapat penurunan gejala kecenderungan depresi terhadap mahasiswa setelah menerima intervensi berupa bibliotherapy. Penelitian ini diharapkan mampu menjadi acuan terhadap mahasiswa yang mengalami kecenderungan depresi menjadikan bibliotherapy sebagai bentuk penanganan mandiri.

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The significant impact of mental health disorders has led to their recognition as a global concern. According to the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2023), 75% of individuals with mental disorders in low- and middle-income countries, including Indonesia, do not receive the necessary treatment. Data from the Basic Health Research of the Health Research and Development Agency (Kementrian Kesehatan RI, 2018) revealed that mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety, affected individuals in Indonesia as early as the age of 15, with approximately 6% of the population, or around 14 million people.

One vulnerable group to depression is college students. Common psychological disorders experienced by students include alcohol addiction, panic, anxiety, and depression (Auerbach et al., 2018). Hadianto et al. (2014) found that out of the participating students (N=208), 30.8% experienced symptoms of depression, with 15.4% mild, 13% moderate, and 2.4% severe depression levels.

Dirgayunita (2016) stated that the causes of depression among students included unpleasant experiences such as bullying, relationship breakups, academic failures, and parental pressure. In addition, Mofatteh (2021) suggested that depression in students was influenced by 6 factors, namely psychological, academic, biological, lifestyle, social, and economic. According to Bhatia and Bhatia (2007), depression can have a long-lasting or recurrent effect. It also impacts an individual's functioning and ability to lead a meaningful life at school, work, or home. Without proper intervention, depression can have fatal consequences, negatively affect individual growth and development, or lead to suicidal behavior.

Beck and Alford (2009) proposed that depression encompassed several aspects,

including emotional, cognitive, motivational, and physical components. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), symptoms of depression include a depressed mood characterized by sadness, crying, hopelessness, emptiness, loss of interest and pleasure in activities, significant changes in weight such as weight gain or loss of appetite, insomnia, and hypersomnia, psychomotor agitation, loss of energy and frequent fatigue, feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, and excessive guilt, decreased ability to think, difficulty concentrating, indecisiveness or doubt, thoughts of death, and suicidal ideation.

Ardi et al. (2021) found that depression among students was a prevalent phenomenon requiring serious attention. However, the reality on the ground indicates that seeking help from psychologists is still uncommon. This was supported by Moro et al. (2015), which discovered a high prevalence of depression but a low level of seeking professional help. According to Yu et al. (2015), three factors influence the intention and behavior of seeking help, namely health status, sociodemographic factors, and mental health literacy.

Previous studies developed various interventions to address depression, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (Gautam et al., 2020; Veleza et al., 2019), problem-solving therapy, expressive writing for depression (Xu et al., 2021), psychodynamic psychotherapy (Ribeiro et al., 2017), mindfulness therapy (Westphal et al., 2021), logotherapy (Widiaratri & Yudianto, 2022), interpersonal psychotherapy (Noviza & Koentjoro, 2014), and bibliotherapy (Soliman et al., 2016). One intervention that can be implemented for individuals with depression is bibliotherapy because it is considered an easily accessible and affordable option for students.

Eliasa (2007) defined bibliotherapy as a therapeutic approach in which individuals utilize books as a medium to gain insights and summaries of stories, poems, or other written works. It is considered a favorable option for providing easily accessible psychological support to the community. It is also the most commonly used intervention in self-help approaches for depression (Jorm et al., 2002).

Deoshree (2018) conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of bibliotherapy on reducing depression symptoms. The study focused on the effectiveness of a self-help book in alleviating mild to moderate depression symptoms. The results showed that bibliotherapy was effective in reducing depression symptoms and improving cognitive function among participants. While previous studies also used cognitive interventions to address depression, this particular study emphasized four aspects, namely cognitive, emotional, motivational, and physical. Moreover, it highlighted the significance of catharsis and insight processes in bibliotherapy, which played crucial roles in reducing depression symptoms among the participants.

The impact of reading has long been recognized since individuals can alter their attitudes and behaviors based on what they read. This notion aligns with Rohmiyati's (2019) perspective on bibliotherapy, stating it can enhance an individual's well-being and motivation to reconcile with themselves and solve problems. Reading books enables individuals to recognize themselves, as well as acquire and use information as input for problem-solving. According to Eliasa and Iswanti (2014), bibliotherapy serves the function of developing individuals' self-concept, improving understanding, fostering self-honesty, showing that others have

similar problems, enhancing emotional regulation, and assisting in planning steps to solve the problems faced.

In many cases of mild depression, medication may not be necessary, making bibliotherapy an effective self-help approach. However, individuals still require adequate training and understanding of the concepts. Bibliotherapy intervention is suitable for various age groups, ranging from children to adults, making it applicable to students as well.

Based on the initial survey, 56.4% of 39 students had a high interest in reading books. However, the coping mechanisms employed by students, such as watching movies, going out, or engaging in sports, only provided a temporary solution, indicating their problems were unresolved. Engaging in bibliotherapy can provide students with an easy and effective means to address problems.

Considering the aforementioned information, conducting a study on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in reducing depression tendencies among students is a compelling prospect. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in alleviating depression tendencies among students in Makassar City.

## **METHOD**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a pre-experimental using a one-group pretest-posttest design, and a single group of participants who received an intervention with both pre-test and post-test (Yusuf, 2014).

O1 → X → O2

Description:

O1 = pre-test

O2 = post-test

X = bibliotherapy intervention

## Study Subjects

The subjects were 7 students from Makassar City who exhibited depression and had an interest in reading. They comprised 5 females and 2 males recruited through a purposive sampling technique. The subjects who met at least 5 diagnosis criteria for depression that persisted for a minimum of 2 weeks were considered eligible.

## Data Collection Method

Data were collected using the Depression Diagnosis Criteria Checklist, developed based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This checklist was used to identify eligible participants. This study referred to the DSM-V, where individuals were considered to have depression tendencies when they fulfilled at least 5 diagnosis criteria that persisted for a minimum of 2 weeks.

The reading materials used consisted of 3 articles titled "When the Sound of Sadness Echoes from the Deepest Heart," "Would You Like to Have Tea with Me?" and "Living with Resilience and Freedom." These articles were extracted from the chapter titled "When I Don't Know What I Want" in the book authored by Jeon Seunghwan. Prior to the study, a pilot study 1 was conducted to select the book to be used. Subsequently, pilot study 2 was carried out to select 3 out of 5 chapters, based on the assessment of comprehension, storyline realism, alignment with the theme of depression tendencies criteria, and the attractiveness level of the content.

Observation sheets were used to record the observation results of the participants during the experiment. A total of 7 observers were used in this study, corresponding to the number of participants. They were recruited based on their qualifications as final-year psychology students and psychology graduates who had

completed courses on Observation and Interview.

After receiving the bibliotherapy intervention in the form of reading the 3 articles, the participants were provided with Catharsis and Insight Sheets. These sheets served the purpose of evaluating the participants' understanding and the effects experienced following the intervention.

## Intervention Procedure

### 1) Preparation Before Study

#### a. Participants' Identification

This study screened participants based on the criteria of experiencing depression tendencies using a Google Form. Prospective participants were contacted to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study.

#### b. Book Selection

A total of 3 articles were selected through pilot studies 1 and 2, focusing on problems related to depression tendencies.

#### c. Observation Sheets

Observation sheets were prepared for the experimental instructors to record observation results. In addition, checklist sheets for depression diagnosis criteria, catharsis, and insight were prepared for each participant.

### 2) Implementation Stage

#### a. Building Rapport

The activity commenced with the facilitator establishing rapport with the participants by inquiring about their well-being or current state, creating a friendly atmosphere.

#### b. Introducing the Activities

The facilitator explained the sequence and objectives of the activities to be conducted.

3) Giving Pre-Test

Participants were administered the depression diagnosis criteria checklist as a pre-test measurement tool to assess their depression tendencies before receiving any treatment.

4) Giving Intervention (Bibliotherapy)

The experimental participants, consisting of 7 individuals, underwent the treatment of reading 3 articles titled "When the Sound of Sadness Echoes from the Deepest Heart," "Would You Like to Have Tea with Me?", and "Living with Resilience and Freedom." This reading activity took place individually in a counseling room and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

5) Catharsis

After reading the articles, the participants gathered in the experimental room to engage in catharsis. The facilitator instructed them to express their feelings as well as explore the connection between the content of the articles and their personal experiences by writing on the catharsis sheets. The purpose of this process was to help individuals gain a better understanding of themselves.

6) Finding Insight

Following the catharsis session, insight sheets were distributed to each participant and instructed to record their feelings after reading the 3 articles and document any insights gained from participating in the series of bibliotherapy processes.

7) Giving Post-Test

At this stage, participants' depression tendencies were re-evaluated using a diagnosis criteria checklist as a post-test measure to observe any changes that occurred after receiving bibliotherapy treatment.

**Data Analysis Technique**

The Wilcoxon test was utilized with the assistance of SPSS 23.0 for Windows program to determine the difference in mean between 2 paired data samples. This data analysis technique was employed because this study aimed to examine whether the depression tendencies of participants decreased after receiving the intervention.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the score results obtained from the participants

**Table 1.** Scores of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Initial	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain score
NAK	15	8	-7
MIN	16	14	-2
MIH	16	14	-2
RRFR	17	15	-2
ZFN	16	6	-10
RJR	20	9	-11
RRR	21	14	-7
Mean	17	11	-6

The comparison results in Table 1 show a pre-test mean of 17 and a post-test

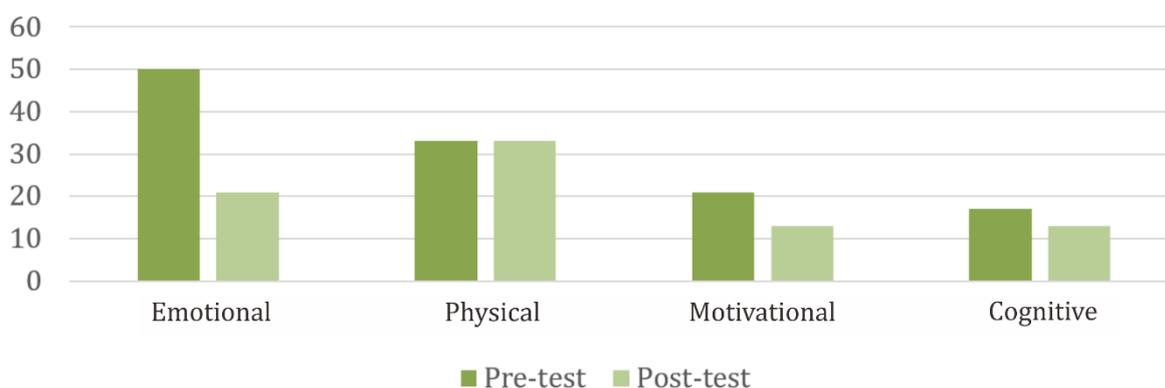
mean of 11, indicating a decrease in the mean within the experimental group.

**Table 2.** Wilcoxon Test Results

	Pre-Test and Post-Test	Description
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.017	Hypothesis is accepted

The analysis results presented in Table 2 using the Wilcoxon test indicated **the hypothesis was accepted**. Therefore, there was a significant difference between the pre-

test and post-test scores, suggesting that bibliotherapy was effective in reducing depression tendencies among students.



**Figure 1.** Pre-Test and Post-Test Results Based on Aspects

Figure 1 illustrates that the highest changes in pre-test and post-test results are observed in the emotional aspect, followed by the motivational and cognitive aspects. However, the physical aspect showed no change in the scores.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in reducing depression tendencies among students in Makassar City. The intervention included the book titled "When I Don't Know What I Want" by Jeon Seunghwan, a depression diagnosis criteria checklist based on DSM-V, observation, catharsis, as well as insight sheets. The results showed a decrease in depression symptom scores before and after the participants received the treatment, which involved reading materials (articles).

These conclusions were supported by (Deoshree, 2018), which also showed the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in individuals with mild to moderate depression in adults. A reduction in depression symptoms was

observed among the group receiving bibliotherapy.

It was also found that all 7 participants (100%) obtained lower post-test scores compared to their pre-test scores. Specifically, participant RJR had the highest changes in pre-test and post-test scores with a decrease of 11, followed by ZFN, NAK, and RRR with 10, 7, and 7, respectively. Meanwhile, MIN, MIH, and RRFR had the lowest decrease in depression symptom scores, namely 2. Therefore, bibliotherapy can be concluded as effective in reducing depression tendencies. These results aligned with Soliman et al. (2016), which showed bibliotherapy was effective in reducing mild depression symptoms, such as irritability, sleep problems, fatigue, as well as issues related to thoughts and behaviors, among students.

The pre-test results, when grouped by depression aspects, showed that the 7 participants had high symptom levels in the emotional aspect, followed by the physical, motivational, and cognitive aspects. This

indicated that participants predominantly experienced depression tendencies related to emotions. Targum and Nierenberg (2011) found that individuals who struggle to cope with negative emotions were more likely to experience other depression symptoms. Therefore, negative emotions had an impact on sleep, energy, motivation, and clear thinking abilities, resulting in higher scores in the emotional aspect.

The highest changes in pre-test and post-test results were obtained in the emotional aspect, followed by the motivational and cognitive aspects, while the physical aspect showed no change in scores. This is because bibliotherapy primarily targets emotional, cognitive, and motivational aspects. These results aligned with Agusryani (2018), which claimed the goal of bibliotherapy was to guide individuals toward positive thinking, analyze attitudes and behaviors, express problems, and provide alternative solutions.

The catharsis results revealed that participants shared and related the problems described in the articles read. They were able to effectively understand the depicted situations and draw conclusions from the articles. The participants experienced sadness in the first article, a sense of reassurance that they were not alone in facing their problems in the second article, and a feeling of encouragement in the third article. This was supported by Eliasa (2007), which suggested the use of bibliotherapy could facilitate individuals to think easily as well as evoke desired attitudes, feelings, and behaviors.

In the insight stage, participants were able to extract positive aspects from the 3 presented articles. They showed an awareness of their current situations, made efforts to become better individuals, and found the motivation to persevere and confront their problems. After reading, participant RRR realized that they had always been fighting against their own

emotions and felt motivated to improve themselves as well as channel their feelings toward positive outlets, such as art. Meanwhile, NAK realized the validity of their emotions and expressed a desire to share their feelings of sadness or disappointment with others, no longer feeling alone.

Participant MIH gained insight that every individual should discover their true identity, love themselves, and strive to become a better person in the future. After reading the book, RRR acknowledged that being oneself is a right for everyone. ZFN gained insight that each individual had a unique journey and process, as well as the need to value every process. Meanwhile, RJR gained a new and broader perspective after reading the articles, enabling them to make wiser decisions and feel motivated to fight harder.

The catharsis and insight results showed that participants were able to see the brighter side, develop hope, a desire for self-improvement, and a willingness to love themselves. Reading activities can promote individuals to recognize themselves by interpreting the author's thoughts and translating them into meaningful messages. The resulting emotions can serve as a driving force to solve problems and engage in more positive behaviors. This was supported by Eliasa (2007), which emphasized bibliotherapy or reading therapy could motivate individuals to solve problems, heal negative emotions, and act as a powerful instrument of recovery.

The results showed a significant decrease in emotional symptoms such as sadness, pessimism, gloominess, and despair. This outcome could be attributed to the bibliotherapy approach employed, which aimed to foster positive emotions and encourage self-exploration and self-recognition. Catharsis and insight methods were also introduced to guide participants in identifying and acknowledging their emotions.

It could be concluded that bibliotherapy influenced the cognitive aspect, as individuals gained new inputs and perspectives relevant to their problems. A new insight, namely the motivation to courageously restart preferred positive activities, was provided in this study.

It was pertinent noting that no changes were observed in the physical aspect, likely due to the relatively short duration of the participants' involvement in this study. It was suggested that engaging in regular physical activities, such as running or yoga, could be beneficial. This aligned with Pingkan et al. (2019), which emphasized the effectiveness of exercise as an intervention for depression disorders.

The above explanations show that the role of bibliotherapy is to enhance individuals' understanding and knowledge, develop self-concepts, as well as emotional resilience and stress management. This process helps individuals with depression tendencies break free from chaotic thoughts and negative emotions. By reading books, individuals can gain self-recognition, as well as acquire and utilize information as input for problem-solving. In many cases of mild depression, medical treatment may not be necessary, making bibliotherapy an effective self-help approach. However, individuals still require appropriate training and a thorough understanding of the concepts.

This study had limitations in terms of measurement instruments, as it solely relied on the Depression Diagnosis Criteria Checklist from DSM-V and did not employ a more measurable scale. This makes it

difficult to accurately ascertain the severity of depression. The gender distribution among participants was also imbalanced, with 2 males and 5 females, limiting further analysis to investigate the influence of bibliotherapy on reducing depression symptoms from a gender perspective.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the hypothesis test conducted using the Wilcoxon test in the SPSS 23.0 for Windows program revealed the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in reducing depression tendencies among students in Makassar City. The measurement results showed a decrease in the values of depression tendencies between the pre-test and post-test after receiving bibliotherapy intervention.

### **Suggestions**

This study is expected to provide a foundation for scientists or professional psychologists to consider bibliotherapy as an alternative additional intervention for addressing clients with psychological disorders. Students are promoted to utilize bibliotherapy as a self-help approach when facing problems and challenges in life. Further studies should utilize more reliable measurement instruments to ensure data validity and consider increasing the number of participants to enrich the data collected. They are also recommended to carefully explore other factors that may influence bibliotherapy and focus on addressing the physical aspect of students with depression

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