

Mental health awareness intervention for junior high school students in Jakarta

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Abstract

Purpose: Adolescence is a time of significant physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral upheaval, making teenagers susceptible to experiencing difficulties. With a limited number of professionals available to address the escalating trend of mental health problems, there is growing interest in preventive measures. This study aims to evaluate the impact of a two-hour educational program aimed at promoting mental health awareness among junior high school students in Jakarta.

Method: A one-group post-test only design was carried out in providing psychoeducational activities regarding adolescent development, mental health, and help-seeking behavior. Seventy-three students participated in this activity, selected purposively.

Result: The findings from this research demonstrate that the students' comprehension of mental health and their willingness to seek help improved significantly after participating in a psychoeducation program.

Conclusion: Understanding and promoting mental health awareness and literacy among adolescents has been shown to be effective through education on their world, mental health, and help-seeking behavior.

Keywords: *awareness; mental health; students*

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (2022), health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being that enables individuals to lead productive lives within their communities. This definition encompasses three key elements. Physical health refers to the absence of disease or impairment, optimal organ function, and the body's ability to resist illness. Social health encompasses positive interactions within society, enabling full participation in social and economic activities. Mental health pertains to emotional and psychological well-being, including the capacity for healthy thoughts, feelings, and relationships. In accordance with UU no. 18 Tahun 2014, mental health is described as a state of well-being that allows individuals to realize their abilities, work productively, cope with stress, and contribute to their community.

The term "mental health" is gaining popularity across various groups, particularly among adolescents. Adolescents, aged 12-24, are in a period of transition and identity formation, often referred to as an identity search (Erikson, 1968). During this time, adolescents' emotional brain development outpaces the development of problem-solving, anticipation, control, and planning areas of the brain (Steinberg, 2008). Additionally, fluctuating growth hormones due to puberty

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can lead to extreme emotional turmoil, making adolescents more susceptible to mental health issues.

Veit and Ware (1983) suggested that a sign of poor mental health is the presence of symptoms such as excessive anxiety, restlessness, confusion, and difficulty concentrating. Individuals struggling with mental health issues may experience various negative impacts, including academic difficulties, social isolation, school dropout, engaging in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, and even suicide (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2022). According to the 2018 National Basic Health Research data, the prevalence of mental disorders, as indicated by symptoms of depression and anxiety, among individuals aged 15 and above, affected approximately 6.1% of Indonesia's population, equivalent to around 11 million people. Furthermore, adolescents aged 12-24 years had a depression rate of 6.2%. It is noteworthy that adolescents experiencing severe depression are more inclined to engage in self-harm and, tragically, even to contemplate or attempt suicide.

According to findings from the Indonesia-National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) focusing on adolescents aged 10-17 years, it was discovered that one in three adolescents experienced a mental health issue in the past 12 months. The most prevalent issues reported were anxiety (26.2%), attention deficit/hyperactivity (10.6%), and depression (5.3%). Moreover, the majority of concerns were identified within the family dynamic (64%), followed by peer interactions (41%), school-related challenges (39%), and personal distress (27%). The data from I-NAMHS indicates that over a third of teenagers (34.9%) encountered a mental health issue in the previous year. There were no discernible variations in patterns between genders or between younger (10-13 years) and older (14-17 years) teenagers. As adolescents transition into this phase, academic pressures also emerge as they move from elementary school to middle school. New learning methods, different environments and social circles, as well as adjusted routines can introduce additional stressors for teenagers.

To effectively address serious mental health issues in adolescents, the involvement of mental health professionals such as psychologists and psychiatrists is essential. By 2023, Indonesia is projected to have nearly 3,000 active clinical psychologists serving a population of 278 million. Relying solely on individualized treatment to tackle mental health challenges in the community may prove to be insufficient. Therefore, implementing psychoeducation activities as a preventive measure could be beneficial in addressing mental health issues.

Psychoeducation is a treatment method that involves educating individuals about the symptoms, treatments, and prognosis of mental illness, with the goal of raising awareness, providing tools to manage symptoms, and promoting behavioral and attitudinal changes related to the condition (Colom, 2011). It is aimed at both preventing and intervening early in mental health problems for individuals and families (Herrera et al., 2023). Utilizing proactive techniques, psychoeducation seeks to facilitate better understanding and processing of complex and emotionally charged information, employing a holistic and competence-based approach that emphasizes health, collaboration, coping, and empowerment (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004). Psychoeducation can be delivered through various formats, such as individual or group sessions. For adolescents, one effective group approach involves conducting seminars to enhance their understanding and literacy on mental health issues.

Mental health literacy encompasses knowledge about mental disorders and positive steps to maintain one's own and others' mental well-being (Jorm, 2019). Inadequate mental health literacy can lead to unhealthy behavior, feelings of shame in acknowledging one's condition due to fears of societal acceptance, and inaccurate self-diagnoses (Manguel, 1996). One approach to enhancing mental health literacy involves fostering a better understanding of mental health itself. A recent study by Beukema, Tullius, Korevaar, Hofstra, & Reijneveld (2022) revealed that teenagers often struggle to distinguish between typical challenges and potential symptoms of mental disorders. They may downplay their experiences and worry that their peers and educators may not be equipped to support them. The study also highlighted the widespread belief among both teenagers and teaching staff that there is a need for a comprehensive mental health literacy program at the secondary school level, encompassing self-awareness and long-term well-being.

In the realm of education, mental health literacy is not yet a standard part of the curriculum. While some educational institutions are beginning to incorporate it as an additional or co-curricular activity, it is not universally adopted. Implementing mental health literacy at the individual level is challenging, so one approach is to deliver education in group settings or through psychoeducation. Psychoeducation is an intervention providing understanding of mental health conditions and how to manage or cope with them, primarily aimed at individuals with mental disorders and their families (Lukens & McFarlane, 2004). This concept has been adapted to impart mental health literacy at the junior high school level through large-scale mental health seminars. These seminars aim to educate students about the concept of mental health, indicators of positive and negative mental health conditions, signs to watch for in order to maintain good mental health, common issues faced by teenagers, and how to prevent mental health problems in students.

METHOD

In this study, a quantitative approach with an experimental design was employed (Seniati, Yulianto, Berniadi, 2005). This particular experimental research utilized a one-group posttest only design, involving a single research group that was tested after manipulation. The study population comprised all junior high school students in the South Jakarta area, with a sample size of 73 students selected purposively. Data collection involved administering a questionnaire to each participant.

The measuring instrument used to assess the dependent variable comprises five closed questions, developed independently by the research team based on the material presented in the provided intervention.

1. What is meant by mental health?
2. If someone feels anxious or worried when they are left behind by current trends, and see other people doing interesting activities that they are not participating in. What teenage problems might occur?
3. Strategies involving increasing self-awareness, focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, and practicing self-compassion can help overcome...
4. What steps are involved in Help Seeking Behavior?
5. What types of assistance do counseling, therapy and medical and non-medical interventions from psychologists and psychiatrists include?

The questions are organized based on the structure of the material to be presented, with each question corresponding to the main topic being covered. Four answer choices are given for each question, and a correct answer demonstrates the seminar student's sound understanding of the topic discussed in the question. Data was collected once treatment was administered. The data analysis employed in this research is descriptive analysis aimed at assessing mental health literacy after treatment (posttest).

RESULT

Participants consisted of 73 students with an age range of 12-15 years, the majority of whom were girls (70%). Based on information from the teacher, all participants in the activity were the Student Council members at the school.

Table 1

Demographic Data

Needs	Freq	%
Age		
12 years old	2	3%
13 years old	31	42%
14 years old	34	47%
15 years old	6	8%
Gender		
Male	22	30%
Female	51	70%
Grade		
VII	29	40%
VIII	44	60%
Parents' Marital Status		
Married	65	90%
Divorced	4	5%
Separated by death	4	5%

According to the research findings, a large majority of participants demonstrated a good understanding of mental health literacy. Specifically, 79% of participants correctly answered questions related to a comprehensive definition of mental health, while the remaining 21% had only a partial understanding. Among them, 14% defined mental health as the absence of mental disorders, and 7% associated it solely with emotional well-being. Notably, 94% of the participants could correctly identify symptoms of mental problems/disorders with the appropriate condition label, and 99% knew the necessary steps for seeking help. When it came to recognizing the classification of available types of assistance, 69% of the participants were able to do so accurately, while the rest struggled with this classification.

The indicator with the lowest accuracy in answers was related to strategies for anticipating mental health problems, with only 61% of the participants answering correctly. While participants were able to connect this anticipatory strategy with potential conditions that could be addressed, it is believed that due to the extensive range of conditions being studied, they still did not make the right connections.

Table 2

Posttest Result

Indicator	Freq (right answers)	%
Knowledge about mental health	56	79%
Symptom identification of mental health	69	94%
Strategies to anticipate mental health problems	43	61%
Help-seeking behavior	70	99%
Help identification	49	69%

DISCUSSION

This study seeks to examine the effectiveness of psychoeducation in enhancing mental health literacy among junior high school students. The psychoeducation program includes an overview of adolescent challenges, an introduction to mental health, identification of related terms, and guidance on seeking help. These components align with Broek et al.'s (2023) findings, emphasizing the importance of increasing awareness, identifying personal experiences, and promoting help-seeking behavior. The use of printed materials such as flyers and leaflets is considered effective for this purpose. In this study, third-year psychology students, supervised and trained, delivered the mental health education.

This study revealed that educational interventions related to mental health significantly improved participants' understanding of mental health, recognition of symptoms, and willingness to seek help, with an effectiveness rate of over 90%. Similar findings were reported by Mahmud et al. (2023) and Fitriani & Syaifullah (2024), indicating that traditional educational approaches can enhance health literacy and mental health awareness. Given that adolescence is a crucial stage marked by various internal and external changes, it is crucial to prioritize mental health literacy from the junior high school level onward, as young people are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges stemming from both biological and environmental factors (Ortiz-Wilson, 2023).

The research has limitations as the measurements were conducted only once without a control group, making it difficult to determine whether changes occurred as a result of providing psychoeducation. Future studies should include evaluations before and after the intervention to compare the results at the end of the program. Additionally, the limited time provided by schools results in compressed delivery of material, impacting the depth of understanding, especially on indicators not closely related to teenagers' daily lives (less than 70% understanding). Regarding implementation, the room size and student placement were adequate for the number of participants, but there was a decrease in participant interest over time due to the dense material.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the descriptive data analysis suggest that providing psychoeducation on mental health can enhance mental health literacy among junior high school students. To address potential limitations, future research should consider conducting pre-intervention tests for comparison, organizing the delivery of material into multiple sessions, incorporating interactive activities, and providing training on adolescent mental health to parents and teachers, who are crucial supporters of adolescents.

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