

The Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy to Improve Subjective Well-Being among Adolescents Living in Islamic Boarding Schools in a Rural District of Indonesia

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Abstract

Introduction: Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by significant emotional, cognitive, and social changes, during which individuals begin to form their identity and long-term psychological patterns. **Objective:** This study investigates the effectiveness of bibliotherapy as a psychological intervention to enhance subjective well-being (SWB) in adolescents living in dayahs in Aceh Besar. **Methods:** This quasi-experimental study employed a one-group pre-test and post-test design involving 61 adolescent students with low levels of subjective well-being (SWB). Data were collected using validated Indonesian versions of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences (SPANE), and analyzed using paired-sample *t*-tests. **Results and Discussion:** The results revealed statistically significant improvements in overall subjective well-being (SWB) ($p = 0.001$), life satisfaction ($p = 0.001$), positive affect ($p < 0.001$), and a reduction in negative affect ($p = 0.001$). These findings demonstrate that bibliotherapy is a practical, low-cost, flexible intervention that can be implemented by nurses, educators, or librarians within school or community settings. **Conclusion:** It offers a practical approach to promoting emotional balance and enhancing life satisfaction among adolescents, particularly those in resource-limited boarding school environments. This study highlights the importance of integrating bibliotherapy into adolescent health programs, particularly in religious educational settings, to enhance psychological well-being and promote resilient youth.

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage marked by significant emotional, cognitive, and social changes, during which individuals begin to form their identity and long-term psychological patterns (Scott and Saginak, (2016). For adolescents residing in Islamic boarding schools (commonly referred to as *dayahs*), the experience is uniquely shaped by a structured and often rigid environment, which is distant from familial support. In such settings, subjective well-being (SWB), defined as an individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of their own life satisfaction and emotional balance, becomes a vital psychological factor. SWB encompasses life satisfaction, the presence of positive emotions, and the absence of negative emotions, offering an essential lens through which adolescent mental health can be understood and enhanced (Diener and Ryan, 2009).

Empirical evidence suggests that adolescents with low SWB are more vulnerable to emotional disturbances, academic stress, and interpersonal conflicts (Steinmayr et al. 2019). In *dayah*, adolescents often face limited rest, high academic pressure, and reduced recreational opportunities, which exacerbate emotional stressors (Asniar et al. 2018). A study conducted in Aceh by Fitri et al. (2021) revealed that students experienced fatigue, homesickness, and psychosomatic issues such as gastritis and skin irritations due to the intensity of their daily routines. Furthermore, many of these students were not self-motivated to attend boarding schools but were sent due to parental expectations, which may have impacted their emotional resilience.

Globally, research has emphasized the role of social support and environmental context in enhancing SWB. Chen and Shi (2019) and Matic, (2021) noted that peer and parental support significantly influence adolescent SWB, particularly in boarding environments. Similar findings in Indonesia by Pramisy and Hermaleni, (2021) and Dewi et al. (2021) indicated that social support from family, teachers, and peers strongly correlates with increased SWB among adolescents.

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs reported that there are over 1,746 *dayah* institutions in Aceh alone *Kementrian Agama RI*, (2023) emphasizing the significance of targeted mental health interventions in these environments. Despite this need, health promotion programs such as *Program Pelayanan Kesehatan Peduli Remaja* (PKPR) are inconsistently implemented across regions, and little emphasis is placed on preventive mental health efforts like SWB screening (Yustikarini, 2021). Interviews with PKPR health workers at Darussalam and Kuta Baro Public Health Center confirmed that systematic mental well-being training and monitoring are rarely conducted in *dayah*.

Several psychological interventions have been explored to address adolescent well-being, including peer support programs, emotion regulation training, and gratitude therapy (Pamungkas et al. 2021). However, many of these interventions require clinical settings, specialized practitioners, or long-term engagement, limiting their applicability in *dayah*. In contrast, bibliotherapy emerges as a practical, low-cost, and flexible alternative that can be implemented within educational or community-based settings (Tasijawa et al. 2021).

Rooted in the Health Promotion Model (HPM) by Nola Pender, bibliotherapy aligns with the idea that health behaviors are influenced by individual characteristics, situational influences, and interpersonal relationships (McEwan & Wills, 2021). According to this model, empowering adolescents to engage in self-care through structured educational interventions can significantly enhance their health outcomes. Therefore, this study applies HPM as a conceptual framework to investigate the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in improving SWB among adolescents in Aceh Besar *dayah* institutions.

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Given the gap in existing mental health services and the promising potential of bibliotherapy, this research aims to evaluate its effectiveness as an intervention to increase life satisfaction and emotional balance in adolescents with low levels of SWB. This study is not only expected to contribute to academic discourse in nursing and psychology but also to serve as a practical model for implementing mental health promotion within religious educational institutions in Indonesia.

Method

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design, utilizing a one-group pre-test and post-test approach, to assess the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in enhancing subjective well-being among adolescents residing in Islamic boarding schools (dayah) in Aceh Besar, Indonesia. The study design enabled the comparison of participants' subjective well-being scores before and after the intervention to assess its impact.

Result and Discussion

1. Result

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Characteristics of Dayah Adolescent Respondents in Aceh Besar (N=61)

No	Respondent Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Age		
	Early Teens (12-16 years old)	48	78.7
	Late Teens (17-25 years old)	13	21.3
2	Gender		
	Man	61	100.0
	Women	0	0.0
3	Origin of Region of Residence		
	City	19	31.1
	Village	42	68.9
4	Parental Income/Month		
	≥ UMP Aceh	15	24.6
	< UMP Aceh	46	75.4
5	Health Issues		
	Exist	35	57.4
	None	26	42.6

Based on Table 1, the total number of respondents in this study is 61, with the majority falling into the early adolescent age group (12–16 years), accounting for 78.7%. All of the respondents in this study are male (100%). Most of them come from rural areas (68.9%). A majority of the respondents' parents have lower-middle income levels, specifically earning less than 3,685,616 IDR (75.4%). Additionally, 57.4% of the respondents reported experiencing health problems within the past three months.

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Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Subjective Well-Being, Life Satisfaction and Affect Positive and Negative Affect Values Before and After Dayah Adolescents in Aceh Besar

Variable	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean \pm SD	Min – Maks	Mean \pm SD	Min – Maks
Subjective Well-Being	21.2 \pm 6.95	4.00 – 32.00	30.81 \pm 10.18	7.00 – 55.00
Life Satisfaction	21.2 \pm 5.04	7.00 – 33.00	28.1 \pm 6.61	11.00 – 35.00
Affect Positive and Affect Negative	-0.06 \pm 3.07	-6.00 – 6.00	2.77 \pm 5.71	-8.00 – 20.00

Based on Table 2, there was a significant increase in each variable measuring the subjective well-being of adolescents in Aceh Besar. Regarding the subjective well-being variable, the pre-test score showed an average of 21.2 with a standard deviation (SD) of ± 6.95 , with a minimum-maximum range of 4.00 to 32.00. In the post-test, the average score increased to 30.81 with a standard deviation (SD) of ± 10.18 , and a wider range of 7.00 to 55.00.

For the life satisfaction variable, the pre-test average score was 21.2 with a standard deviation (SD) of ± 5.04 , and a score range of 7.00 to 33.00. Meanwhile, in the post-test, the average score rose to 28.1 with a standard deviation (SD) of ± 6.61 , and a range of 11.00 to 35.00.

As for the positive and negative affect variable, the pre-test yielded a negative average score of -0.06 with a standard deviation (SD) of ± 3.07 , and a narrow score range of -6.00 to 6.00. However, in the post-test, a significant improvement was observed, with the average score increasing to 2.77 and a standard deviation (SD) of ± 5.71 , along with a broader range from -8.00 to 20.00.

Inferential Analysis

Table 3

Differences in Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores of Subjective Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect Variables among Dayah Adolescents in Aceh Besar

Variable	Paired t-Test				
	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean	SD	p-value
Subjective Well-Being	21.2	30.81	-9.57	11.91	<0.001
Life Satisfaction	21.2	28.1	-6.81	8.42	<0.001
Affect Positive and Affect Negative	-0.06	2.77	-2.83	6.21	<0.001

Based on Table 3, the variable of subjective well-being showed an increase in the average score from 21.2 to 30.81. The mean difference was -9.57, with a p-value of < 0.001. This suggests that the intervention or treatment administered was effective in enhancing the subjective well-being of the Dayah adolescents. The life satisfaction variable also experienced an average increase from 21.2 to 28.1, with a mean difference of -6.81 points and a p-value of < 0.001, indicating a statistically significant difference. Furthermore, the variables of positive and negative affect showed a substantial difference

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between the pre-test mean score of -0.06 and the post-test score of 2.77, with a difference of -2.83 points and a p-value of < 0.001 . These results suggest that the intervention had a positive impact.

2. Discussion

The Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy in Enhancing Subjective Well-Being Among Dayah Adolescents in Aceh Besar

A study investigating the impact of bibliotherapy on subjective well-being among dayah adolescents in Aceh Besar revealed a significant improvement, emphasizing the positive effects of bibliotherapy on human development and mental health, particularly in enhancing affective functions, resolving emotional issues, and promoting psychological recovery through mechanisms such as catharsis, self-reflection, and narrative identification.

Given the restricted and emotionally conservative environment of dayah schools, bibliotherapy provides a safe space for adolescents to express their emotions, reflect on personal experiences, and cultivate self-awareness and future optimism — core components of subjective well-being. Varela et al. (2018) noted the role of bibliotherapy in educational settings, where it enhances emotional literacy, reduces learning barriers, and fosters reflective capacity, suggesting its broader psychological benefits, particularly for vulnerable groups.

Supporting this, Utami et al. (2024) reported that bibliotherapy using the book *Filosofi Teras* reduced stress by 64.8% and anxiety by 71.6% among medical students working on their theses. This quasi-experimental study highlighted the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in enhancing emotional resilience.

The theoretical foundation of this intervention is grounded in Shrodes, (1949) bibliotherapy model, which outlines three key stages: identification, catharsis, and insight. In the case of dayah adolescents, participants identified with the reading material, experienced emotional release through reflection, and gained constructive insights to navigate life challenges.

The Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy in Enhancing Life Satisfaction Among Dayah Adolescents in Aceh Besar

The results of the paired sample t-test revealed a significant difference in life satisfaction before and after the bibliotherapy intervention. This finding supports previous studies that highlight the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in improving individuals' psychological conditions. For instance, a similar intervention among inmates at Class II B Correctional Facility in Takalar led to increased meaning in life. Likewise, the current study demonstrated a significant improvement in life satisfaction among dayah adolescents in Aceh Besar after participating in bibliotherapy sessions. Both studies emphasize that bibliotherapy is effective in enhancing self-awareness, improving self-concept, and helping individuals set life goals, whether in the context of correctional facilities or religious educational institutions (Amalia et al., 2022).

This research aligns with the study conducted by Oke et al. (2018) which evaluated the effectiveness of bibliotherapy and self-management techniques in improving life satisfaction among elderly individuals in Nigeria. Bibliotherapy helped elderly participants feel less isolated, discover personal meaning, and develop stronger emotional connections. Despite the age difference between the elderly subjects and adolescents, both studies demonstrate the cross-generational effectiveness of bibliotherapy in

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enhancing psychological well-being. For older adults, bibliotherapy serves as a means to alleviate loneliness and find meaning in post-retirement life, while for dayah adolescents, it facilitates identity exploration, spiritual reflection, and emotional resilience in facing the challenges of religious boarding school life.

Moreover, bibliotherapy is effective in reducing psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression. This is evident in the study by Kirupa and Bhat, (2021), conducted in India among patients with severe physical health conditions, such as chronic foot ulcers accompanied by psychological and emotional distress, which often hinder the healing process. The study confirmed that bibliotherapy significantly reduced stress and depression, thereby improving the quality of life. These findings reaffirm that bibliotherapy is a powerful tool for enhancing mental well-being, even among patients dealing with complex physical health issues.

The Effectiveness of Bibliotherapy in Enhancing Positive Affect and Reducing Negative Affect Among Dayah Adolescents in Aceh Besar

These findings suggest that bibliotherapy has a significant contribution to the enhancement of subjective well-being among Dayah adolescents, particularly in terms of affective dimensions. The increase in positive affect was reflected in greater feelings of happiness, enthusiasm, and gratitude among participants following the intervention. Conversely, there was a notable decrease in negative affect, such as sadness, anxiety, and irritability. This suggests that bibliotherapy effectively promotes emotional regulation through processes of reflection, empathy, and self-identification with characters in the stories. These findings align with previous research by Utami et al. (2023), which explored the relationship between social support and affective well-being. Adolescents with high levels of social support were found to have twice the likelihood of achieving high subjective well-being compared to those with low social support. This supports the importance of supportive, educational, and reflective interventions in promoting adolescent emotional health.

One such relevant intervention is bibliotherapy. A systematic review conducted by Tandon and Sharma (2023) confirmed the effectiveness of this approach in alleviating academic stress and enhancing positive affect, including feelings of calmness, comfort, and psychological safety. Bibliotherapy enables adolescents to identify with characters, release suppressed emotions (catharsis), gain insight, and internalize positive values from stories (universalization), which they can then apply in real-life situations.

From a psychological perspective, positive and negative affect are fundamental dimensions in the assessment of subjective well-being, as proposed by Diener et al. (1999). Bibliotherapy is recognized as a non-pharmacological intervention that enhances positive affect by fostering hope and life enthusiasm through narratives, while simultaneously reducing negative affect by facilitating healthy and guided emotional expression. Through engaging with story characters, participants can vicariously re-experience similar emotional events and reinterpret their personal experiences in more meaningful ways. The implications of these findings suggest that community nurses could adopt bibliotherapy as a novel approach to delivering mental health care within the populations they serve. This is particularly relevant for communities facing emotional and social challenges, such as those affected by mental health crises, natural disasters, or those belonging to vulnerable groups like adolescents and older people. Bibliotherapy has been shown to have positive effects across various aspects of human development and psychological well-being throughout the lifespan.

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In line with the findings of Varela et al. (2018), bibliotherapy in community care settings serves not only as a supplementary therapeutic tool but also as a widely applicable method for various professionals, including nurses, educators, librarians, and therapists. This reinforces the role of community nurses as promotive and preventive agents, especially in addressing psychosocial issues following crises or in communities with limited access to formal mental health services. Moreover, bibliotherapy stands out as a non-invasive and cost-effective intervention, making it a valuable option in mental health promotion strategies.

Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that bibliotherapy is an effective psychological intervention for enhancing subjective well-being among adolescents living in Islamic boarding schools (dayah) in Aceh Besar. Through a series of structured reading sessions, bibliotherapy significantly improved participants' levels of life satisfaction and emotional balance. These results highlight the therapeutic value of reading in fostering cognitive, emotional, and social development among adolescents who may face various mental health challenges in structured and high-demand educational environments.

The intervention's effectiveness aligns with the Health Promotion Model, demonstrating that accessible, low-cost, and culturally sensitive strategies such as bibliotherapy can be successfully integrated into adolescent mental health programs in school and community settings. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of proactive and preventative mental health approaches, particularly in environments where access to professional psychological services may be limited. By promoting emotional resilience and life satisfaction, bibliotherapy serves as a valuable tool in supporting adolescent well-being and development. The findings advocate for the broader implementation of this approach across similar educational and community contexts.

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