

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF LITERACY CULTURE IN SONGKLA, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT This article presents the results of a community service activity conducted on October 28, 2024, facilitated by the Sharing NGO, aimed at empowering teachers and students at Ban Burangae School, Songkla. This empowerment program involved collaboration among lecturers, students, educational staff, and alumni from Indonesia and various other countries. The research focused on ways to improve mental health through literacy for both Indonesian and global communities. Guided training sessions resulted in the formulation of mental health issues, which were then linked to literacy utilization. The evaluation showed significant improvements in participants' self-awareness, self-control, and motivation for self-development.

KEYWORDS: *Culture of Literacy, Community Service, Mental Health*

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are individuals with cognitive abilities to consider and make decisions. The ability to think is a fundamental component in controlling actions and behavior to achieve goals in human life. Cognitive psychology views human behavior as measurable through mental processes such as motivation, beliefs, creativity, and decision-making (Ramadanti et al., 2022). The success of cognitive development is determined by the ability to process information systematically and produce responses appropriate to the situation.

Personality, at its core, is a dynamic pattern of characteristics in thinking, feeling, and behaving in daily life. This determines whether a person is considered psychologically healthy. A person is said to be physically healthy when free from diseases that impede bodily movement and psychologically healthy when free from emotional and mental disturbances (Suryanti, 2021).

Healthy personality is reflected in a person's ability to adapt to various situations and succeed in carrying out life functions optimally in a social environment. Thus, health encompassing both physical and psychological conditions is called mental health.

It is essential to remember that a person's mental health can change over time, depending on various factors. When the demands placed on a person exceed their resources and ability to cope, their mental health can be affected. For example, if someone works long hours, cares for a relative, or faces financial difficulties, they may experience poor mental health. Mental health continues to face challenges regarding definition, measurement, and recognition at both governmental and non-governmental levels (Dahlia et al., 2022). These issues hinder the optimal implementation of mental health programs within the healthcare system. The absence of clear measurement standards makes it difficult to establish success parameters for mental health interventions. Furthermore, the lack of formal recognition of mental health's urgency impacts the limited allocation of resources and policy support needed to address psychological issues in society.

Therefore, mental health remains a focal point across various stages of life, from childhood and adolescence to adulthood. Mental health refers to a condition indicating a person's psychological well-being. It is essential for individuals because it can influence their perception and understanding of the surrounding environment (Ningrum et al., 2022). When a person's sense of self is disrupted, it can lead to failures in controlling thoughts, emotions, and actions, which is known as mental health disorders. These disorders include depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, which directly affect daily life activities.

One sustainable approach to addressing mental health disorders involves literacy. Literacy is the ability to optimize one's potential and skills in processing and understanding information through reading and writing activities (Oktariani & Ekadiansyah, 2020). An active reader gains meaning through interaction with texts, involving the ability to identify key information, analyze content, and integrate new knowledge with existing understanding. Writing, on the other hand, serves as a means to express thoughts, record experiences, and organize information in a structured way to facilitate understanding and applying knowledge about mental health.

Mastering reading and writing activities helps individuals develop an understanding of symptoms, risk factors, and appropriate methods for managing mental health disorders. In everyday life, people frequently access health-related information, from health protocols to nutrition and mental health (Rudianto, 2022). However, research shows that increased access to health information has not yet significantly impacted reducing anxiety cases in Indonesia.

Since the COVID-19 era, anxiety disorders among Indonesians have become increasingly concerning. Various life pressures, from job demands to socioeconomic issues, have led to a rise in

mental health disorders that require special attention. According to the Asia Care 2024 survey by Manulife, Indonesians expressed the highest levels of concern about mental health issues, with 56% reporting stress or burnout, 42.6% sleep disorders, 28.2% anxiety, 24.9% loneliness, 20.7% depression, and 9.1% cognitive impairment out of a total of 1,000 respondents (Simbolon, 2024). This data underscores the importance of ongoing prevention and management efforts for mental health issues through literacy.

Alongside these developments, mental health reading materials, including literary works, motivational books, advice, and self-help content, have become more accessible across various media. Mental health awareness in the information age is reinforced through daily life representations in novels (Language Development and Fostering Agency, 2024). Moreover, according to NPD Group data, the self-help industry in the United States has seen significant growth, with sales reaching 18.6 million volumes in 2019, up 11% since 2013, totaling \$10.5 billion in 2020, and recording a peak of 17.1 million units sold in early January 2021 (Curcic, 2022). This phenomenon reflects a positive transformation in how society views mental health issues. Reading materials effectively educate readers on the complexities of psychological problems through narrative approaches that resonate with everyday life.

In response to these issues, this community service project was initiated to equip teachers and students to address mental health concerns in Indonesia and globally. Overall, literacy plays a crucial role in enhancing mental health. Through literacy, individuals are expected to understand mental health better, ultimately helping reduce stigma, increase help-seeking behaviors, and improve quality of life. This study aims to further examine the role of literacy in the context of mental health and identify strategies to enhance mental health understanding in society.

2. METHOD

This community service activity was conducted as a one-day workshop on October 28, 2024, at Ban Burangae School, Songkla, facilitated by the NGO Sharing, an organization that enables the academic community in Indonesia to collaborate on international Community Service (PKM) activities. The training involved teachers and students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The training was divided into four main stages:

- a. Introduction to Basic Literacy
- b. Therapeutic Writing Practice
- c. Digital Literacy Implementation
- d. Evaluation and Follow-Up

Qualitative data collection was conducted using two methods: participant observation and informal interviews conducted by facilitators during the activity.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The success of this training demonstrated that exercises aimed at improving mental health through literacy serve as valuable motivation and practice to empower teachers and students. Literacy plays a role in enhancing mental health through various reading and writing activities. Literacy activities create a space for self-exploration and a deeper understanding of various aspects of mental health. For instance, libraries and reading resources act as supportive tools in developing psychological well-being. Furthermore, reading self-help books provides practical guidance for achieving optimal mental health. Several materials were used to enhance mental health through literacy, outlined as follows.

Talk About Your Feelings

Joining a discussion group can provide a space to share emotional experiences, helping to achieve a higher level of emotional intelligence. By allowing all members to express their views, combined with the management of positive emotions throughout a gradual problem-solving process, and reinforcement through rewards to maintain motivation, group guidance using problem-solving techniques becomes more effective (Pramono, 2020). Group discussions guided by problem-solving techniques can be an effective tool in education for exploring emotional experiences and developing interpersonal skills.

Eat Healthy Food

Reading articles about nutrition can enhance knowledge about a balanced diet. Consuming nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, folic acid, protein, vitamins B12, A, C, D, and E, as well as minerals like selenium, zinc, and probiotics, can serve as preventive alternatives for addressing mental health issues (Kristy & Mahmudiono, 2022). Understanding nutritional content will help individuals make wiser food choices.

Stay Active

Reading exercise guides provides information on effective movements to encourage a sustainable active lifestyle. A study conducted at Ban Burangae School, Songkla, revealed that regular physical activities such as playing football and badminton positively contribute to reducing anxiety and improving mental calmness in adolescents (Yoisangaji, 2024). By following proper exercise guidelines, it is hoped that teenagers can maintain physical activity habits and experience the benefits for their mental health.

Make Sleep a Priority

Reading books can be done to study articles about sleep cycles and track the frequency of proper sleep patterns. The quality of sleep patterns is deeply linked to an individual's mental health, as prolonged sleep disturbances can trigger symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological stress in daily activities (Daulay, 2024). After learning and recording sleep patterns through reading, understanding the impact of sleep quality on mental health can be applied to improve sleep habits.

Give Yourself Time to Rest and Engage in Enjoyable Activities

Give yourself time to rest and relax by reading books you enjoy. Rest plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health stability by avoiding stressors, allowing both the body and mind to recover energy when fatigued (Ningrum et al., 2022). Taking time to rest and relax is an essential activity in maintaining mental health. Individuals who read books out of enjoyment will have their energy restored and be protected from stress. Therefore, engaging in enjoyable activities that provide peace of mind can help achieve emotional stability.

Stay Connected with Others

The use of gadgets has become commonplace in this digital era. The convenience they provide allows individuals to communicate with others from a distance. However, gadgets can have negative effects if used improperly. Some of the negative impacts include reduced social interaction, sleep disturbances, and stress (Kamaruddin et al., 2023). Therefore, maintaining connections with others through reading and literacy activities can serve as a beneficial alternative for mental health. Sharing thoughts and experiences with others can provide emotional support, reduce feelings of loneliness, and enrich perspectives.

Accept Yourself as You Are

Literacy supports the growth of self-awareness by writing about various life experiences. Writing can serve as a highly valuable therapeutic intervention for individuals, as increasing self-awareness is the first step in making sense of those experiences. There are three types of therapeutic writing: expressive writing, creative writing, and reflective writing (Thatcher, 2022). Expressive writing is designed to allow individuals to explore trauma in depth. Creative writing is often used as a form of self-expression or for publication and public consumption. Reflective writing involves a person expressing or re-evaluating their thoughts and feelings by asking themselves questions while writing.

Care for Others

Introducing information and reading materials to others is a form of caring for mental health. Social media, in the form of video content, has become an effective tool for mental health education for adolescents, as it conveys information through visual and audio recordings about emotional management and self-development in their environment (Imandina et al., 2024). Additionally, video content often includes supporting text and captions. Sharing mental health information through digital content is a positive step in social care for mental health. The development of quality mental health content can help spread knowledge about emotional management and self-development to the wider community, particularly among adolescents who are active on digital platforms.

Seek Professional Help

Information about professional help for mental health can be found online. Through counseling services with psychologists, individuals can discuss the issues they are facing. Online counseling services utilize communication tools and networks to help address career, work, mental health, and social relationship issues with effectiveness comparable to conventional counseling. However, it is not recommended for severe mental disorders or emergency situations that require face-to-face treatment (Ursula, 2021). Online counseling services offer a practical solution for seeking professional help with mental health issues. Through digital technology, access to psychological services has become easier and more affordable. When used appropriately, online counseling can help address various psychological problems, while still considering the limitations and need for in-person treatment for cases that require special attention.

4. CONCLUSION

The community service program, in the form of training, was held on October 28, 2024, at Ban Burangae School in Songkla. The training integrated aspects of basic literacy, therapeutic writing, digital literacy, and ongoing evaluation to enhance global mental health. The guided training method helped participants identify mental health issues and develop literacy-based solutions. Evaluation results showed significant improvements in participants' self-awareness, self-control, and motivation for self-development. The success of this program opens opportunities for further mentoring initiatives to support sustainable progress for participants

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