



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP GUIDANCE USING EXPRESSIVE WRITING TECHNIQUES TO DEVELOP SELF-COMPASSION IN PREVENTING SELF-HARM AMONG VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The phenomenon of *self-harm* that is increasing globally and nationally shows that there is an urgent need for preventive intervention among adolescents. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of group guidance with *expressive writing* techniques to develop *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm* in vocational school students. This study uses a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental *design of one group pretest-posttest*. The subjects of the study were 8 grade XI students at one of the public vocational schools in Malang City who were selected through *purposive sampling* based on the results of measurements using *the Deliberate Self Harm Inventory* (DSHI) and *The Self-Compassion Scale* instruments. Group guidance services were carried out in three sessions, each focusing on aspects of *self-kindness*, *common humanity*, and *mindfulness* by applying *the stages of expressive writing*, so that the results of *pretest* and *posttest* data were obtained, which were then carried out by the analyst through *the Wilcoxon* test. The test produced an *Asymp.Sig* of 0.018 which means that group guidance services with *expressive writing techniques* are effective in developing *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm* in students.

Keywords: *Self-Harm, Self-Compassion, Expressive Writing*

1. Introduction

Self-harm is intentional self-harm behavior that is done as a way to relieve painful emotions that individuals feel. Although it resembles an act of suicide, *self-harm* is not done with the aim of ending life, but rather as an escape mechanism from emotional distress. These behaviors are as diverse as cutting and scratching skin to injury, self-immolation, hitting the head, grabbing hair, and other self-destructive actions (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). This phenomenon is of particular concern because it often occurs secretly and is not detected by the surrounding environment.

In global context, the *Global Burden of Disease* (GBD) report in 2021 recorded 746,000 deaths due to *self-harm* (Xie et al., 2025). In Indonesia, research by Widyawati (2020) shows that 36.9% of the population has engaged in *self-harm* behavior in various forms. Meanwhile, a study conducted on 30 adolescents in the Ngalamfess community of Malang City showed that 50% were in the category of *moderate self-harm*, 43% low, and 7% high (Ramadhani et al., 2024). The data indicates that *self-harm* is a real, complex issue, and requires appropriate attention and intervention, especially among adolescents.

The high prevalence of *self-harm* certainly cannot be separated from the various impacts and causative factors behind it. The physical impact of this behavior can be in the form of injuries, nerve damage, and even death. Meanwhile, psychologically, individuals who commit *self-harm* often experience shame, depression, anxiety, and prolonged stress (Shofia et al., 2024). The appearance of *self-harm* is influenced by various factors, both external and internal factors. External factors include parental parenting, conflicts in social relationships, and pressure from the peer environment (Kalangi et al., 2024). The internal factors that play a role include difficulties in managing emotions, feelings of hopelessness, loss of hope, and traumatic experiences in the past (Ramadhani et al., 2024). One of the internal factors that is increasingly highlighted in relation to *self-harm* is low *self-compassion*, which is an unfriendly attitude and

does not care about oneself when experiencing suffering which ultimately gives rise to stronger negative emotions and has the potential to encourage individuals to self-harm (Khairunnisa et al., 2023).

Self-compassion is the ability to be aware of self-suffering and respond to it with empathy, acceptance, and compassion for oneself (Cleare et al., 2019). In relation to *self-harm*, *self-compassion* acts as a psychological protector that is able to reduce the urge to self-harm. Individuals with high levels of *self-compassion* tend to be better able to recognize and respond to emotional distress in a healthy way. In other words, *self-compassion* encourages the formation of a more positive relationship between the individual and himself which ultimately plays an important role in the prevention of *self-harm* behavior (Cleare et al., 2019). In other words, *self-compassion* helps individuals build a healthier relationship with themselves, which is crucial in preventing the emergence of *self-harmful* behaviors.

This condition is even more relevant if it is associated with Vocational High School (SMK) students who are faced with the demands of vocational education and job readiness at a young age. These demands can increase anxiety and psychological distress, especially in students who feel incompetent or have difficulty adjusting to high skill expectations (Kurniawan et al., 2024). In situations like this, students with low levels of *self-compassion* become more prone to self-harm as a form of escape from the pressure experienced.

Several efforts have been made to prevent *self-harm* in vocational school students, one of which is through classical guidance services with expository techniques. This technique focuses on delivering informative material from BK teachers to students, such as through lectures or presentations to improve their understanding of *self-harm* issues. While effective in imparting knowledge, this approach tends to be one-way and lacks space for students to explore and express deep emotions or personal experiences. In addition, there is research conducted by Purbasafir, (2024) to develop *self-compassion* skills using the CFT (*Compassion Focused Therapy*) method. However, the method places more emphasis on developing compassion through imagination and emotion regulation, but does not specifically provide space for individuals to express traumatic emotions and experiences verbally or in writing.

With the efforts that have been made, and there is a strong relationship between *self-compassion* and *self-harm* tendencies, the researcher plans to carry out one of the techniques that is expected to develop *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm*. The technique to be used is *expressive writing*. *Expressive writing* is defined as the process of writing down thoughts and feelings related to traumatic events or emotions experienced by individuals with the aim of achieving healing and personal growth (Apriani, 2024). *Expressive writing* can address psychological issues, such as lowering stress levels, improving mental health, and strengthening a person's relationship with themselves, which are core elements in the development of *self-compassion*.

Thus, Guidance and Counseling as a service that is present to meet the needs of students has a strategic role in preventing *self-harm behavior* through the development of *self-compassion*. In accordance with its function, this service can be used as the right facilitation medium in helping students recognize and express their emotions in a healthy way. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of group guidance with *expressive writing* techniques to develop *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm* in vocational school students.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative experimental approach of the pre-experimental design method using *One Group Pretest-Posttest*. In this design, one group of subjects is given an initial measurement (*pretest*), then given a specific treatment or intervention, and ends with a final measurement (*posttest*) to see the changes that occur after the intervention (Sugiyono, 2013). In this approach, the researcher compares scores before and after the intervention to

determine the effectiveness of the intervention given. In this study, the intervention in question is a group guidance service with *expressive writing techniques*.

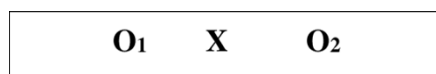


Figure 1. Pretest - Posttest Group Design

Information:

- O1 : Pretest Using the scale *self-compassion* Before the intervention
- X : Providing group guidance treatment with techniques *expressive writing*
- O2 : Posttest using the same scale after the intervention

2.2. Participants

This research was conducted in one of the public vocational schools in Malang City with a population of 70 students in grade XI majoring in Culinary. The research subjects were selected using *the purposive sampling* technique, which is by selecting participants based on certain criteria that have been predetermined. These criteria are determined through the results of filling out the *Deliberate Self Harm Inventory (DSHI)* instrument, which identifies students with *self-harm behavioral tendencies*. From the results of filling in the instruments, 8 students were obtained who met the criteria and were willing to participate in the group guidance process in full. This group is used as an experimental group in research.

2.3. Experimental Procedure

This research was carried out from May 7 to 21, 2025. Before being given the intervention, all participants were given a *pretest* in the form of a *self-compassion scale* in the form of a *Google Form* consisting of 26 items. Furthermore, interventions were given in the form of group guidance services with *expressive writing techniques* which were carried out in three meeting sessions. Each session lasts 1 x 40 minutes and focuses on a different aspect of *self-compassion*. The first session emphasized the aspect of *self-kindness*, which is an attitude full of understanding and gentleness towards oneself. The second session focused on the aspect of *common humanity*, emphasizing that suffering is a natural part of human life. The third session was directed to strengthen the aspect of *mindfulness*, which is the ability to recognize and accept difficult experiences without judgment. Each session uses *expressive writing stages* which include: *recognition/initial write, examination/writing exercise, juxtaposition/feedback, and application to the self*. After all sessions were completed, participants were again given a *posttest* using the same scale as *the pretest*.

2.4. Research Instruments

This study uses two main instruments in the data collection process. The first instrument is *the Deliberate Self Harm Inventory (DSHI)*, which was developed by Gratz, (2001) and has been translated into Indonesian by Sugianto, (2020). This instrument is used to identify students who have a tendency to commit *self-harm* behavior and to determine the subjects to be sampled. This *self-harm* scale consists of 17 statements and uses a *Likert scale*, which is Very Appropriate (SS), Appropriate (S), Less Appropriate (KS), Not Appropriate (TS). The second instrument is *The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)* developed by Neff, (2003) and has been translated into Indonesian by Sugianto et al., (2020). This scale is used to measure students' *levels of self-compassion* before and after the intervention, consisting of 26 items covering various aspects in the *self-compassion* construct. This scale consists of 26

statements and uses a *Likert* scale with a range of 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always).

2.5. Data Analysis

The data obtained from *the results of the pretest and posttest* were analyzed quantitatively using two approaches, namely descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Descriptive analysis is used to describe the general condition of participants before and after the service is provided. Furthermore, an inferential analysis was carried out using *the Wilcoxon test*, which is a non-parametric test used to test the difference in scores between two groups that are related before and after the intervention. This analysis was done with the help of *SPSS for Windows*. Hypothesis testing was carried out to find out if there was a significant difference between *pretest* and *posttest* scores, with the hypothesis of the Ho study: group tutoring services with *expressive writing techniques* were not effective in developing *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm* in vocational school students. Dan Ha: a group tutoring service with *expressive writing techniques* that is effective to develop *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm* in vocational school students.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Before the implementation of the intervention, the researcher first identified the level of *self-harm tendency* in grade XI Culinary students at one of the State Vocational Schools in Malang City. This identification was carried out based on *need assessment* data obtained when the researcher underwent teaching assistance activities at the school. Through the distribution of *the Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory (DSHI)* questionnaire, 8 students were obtained who met the criteria and were used as research subjects. Based on the results of the initial measurement (*pretest*) using the *self-compassion* scale, all students showed a history of *self-harm* with varying levels of *self-compassion*. The majority of students show low levels of *self-compassion*, characterized by a weak attitude of self-compassion, feelings of alienation, and an excessive tendency to identify with negative emotions.

After being given group guidance services using *expressive writing techniques* for three meeting sessions, students were again given a *posttest* using the same instrument. The results of the final measurement showed that 7 out of 8 students experienced an increase in *self-compassion* scores, while 1 student showed a stable score because they had had a high level of *self-compassion* from the beginning.

Bagan 1. Skor Pretest-Posttest Skala Self-Compassion

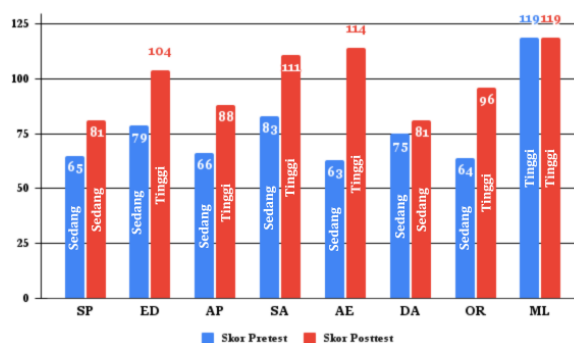


Table 1. Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test Results

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-Test - Pre-Test	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	7 ^b	4.00	28.00
	Ties	1 ^c		
	Total	8		

- a. Post-Test < Pre-Test
- b. Post-Test > Pre-Test
- c. Post-Test = Pre-Test

Table 2. Statistical Test Results

Test Statistics^a

	Post-Test - Pre-Test
Z	-2.366 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.018

- a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
- b. Based on negative ranks.

The results of the processing and using *the wilcoxon signed rank test* showed that the Z value in the *Pre-Post variable of self-compassion level* was -2.366 with a *p-value of Asymp. sig. (2-tailed)* by $0.018 < 0.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that H_a was accepted, which means group guidance services with *expressive writing techniques* are effective in developing *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm* in vocational school students.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study support the results of previous studies that show that *expressive writing* plays an important role in developing *self-compassion*. Pennebaker & Chung, (2007) stated that expressive writing about emotional experiences can help individuals in managing stress, improving self-understanding, and fostering self-compassion. In line with that, (Cleare et al., 2019) posits that *expressive writing* provides a reflective space for individuals to process negative experiences as well as foster an attitude of acceptance without judgment, which is at the core of *self-compassion*.

Statistically, the results of the wilcoxon test showed the effectiveness of the service with an *Asymp value. The sig.* was 0.018 (< 0.05), which means there was a significant difference between the *self-compassion score* before and after the intervention. Of the eight students, seven students experienced an increase in scores, which shows that group guidance services with *expressive writing techniques* have succeeded in developing *self-compassion of* vocational school students. For example, AE students experienced an increase from a score of 63 to 114 indicating a shift from the medium to high category. These results prove that group guidance services with *expressive writing techniques* have a real impact on strengthening *aspects of self-compassion*.

Furthermore, the findings were enriched by an analysis of the change in scores from *pretest to posttest* which showed three patterns of student development. The first pattern is students who have increased both in terms of the number of scores and categories. Students such as ED, AP, SA, AE, and OR show a shift in categories from medium to high. During the implementation of the service they showed active participation such as involvement in group discussions, willingness to share personal experiences, and consistency in completing *expressive writing* tasks in each session. Positive interaction between students is also built so as to create a supportive group dynamic. These findings suggest that active student

involvement and conducive group dynamics are determinants of the success of a group guidance intervention. This is in line with the opinion of Hasanah et al., (2022) who stated that the success of group guidance is greatly influenced by the active participation of members and a supportive group atmosphere. When students feel emotionally secure and accepted in the group, they will be more open to learning from their own experiences as well as those of others. A conducive atmosphere also allows the creation of healthy social interactions so that it can strengthen the effects of the guidance material and accelerate the internalization of the positive values conveyed (Rahim et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, the second pattern shows an increase in scores without a change in category. This happens to SP and DA students, where they have an increased score but are still in the moderate *self-compassion category*. Based on the analysis of written reflections and observation results, these two students showed an increase in awareness of personal emotions contained in the aspects of *self-kindness* and *mindfulness* but did not deeply reflect on the aspects of *common humanity*. The tendency of vocational school students to be more focused on practical skills has an impact on low cognitive engagement in the *dimension of common humanity* that requires social reflection, or seeing that others can also experience the same thing as they feel. This is in line with the findings of Ardhan & Satriadi, (2022) who stated that the level of empathy and prosocial behavior of vocational school students is relatively low, which shows a lack of attention to the welfare of others. Thus, it can be seen that the *dimension of common humanity* has not been able to develop optimally when interventions are carried out through *expressive writing* in vocational school students.

In contrast to the previous two patterns, the third pattern shows the stability of scores and categories in ML students who have been in the high category since the beginning. Pretest data shows that ML already has a high level of *self-compassion* from the beginning. The results of *expressive writing* written by ML also show consistency in recognizing and receiving emotional experiences in a healthy way. This fact suggests that in students with high scores from the start, *expressive writing* plays a role in maintaining the level of *self-compassion* that has been formed even though it does not result in further improvement. These findings show that *expressive writing* not only helps students who are experiencing emotional problems, but is also beneficial for maintaining and strengthening an already good emotional state. According to Apriani, (2024) *expressive writing* can help individuals stay connected to their feelings and experiences, so that they are able to maintain emotional balance. By writing down thoughts and feelings regularly, individuals can better understand themselves, manage stress better, and strengthen emotional resilience in the long term, including when they are not under great pressure.

In line with the analysis of these patterns, mapping aspects of *self-compassion* also provides a more detailed picture. In the aspect of *self-kindness*, there has been a significant increase. This is because in the first session that focuses on this aspect, students are directly invited to recognize and treat themselves with love. Most students express a desire to be stronger, not compare themselves to others and acknowledge the struggles that have been made. This attitude is a concrete form of *self-kindness* as explained by Neff, (2003), namely giving empathy to oneself when suffering.

Nevertheless, different results are shown by the common *humanity* aspect. Students do not seem to be able to fully internalize that suffering is a universal part of the human experience. This is obtained when students are guided to reflect on the implementation of services at the end after the session is about to end. Although in the second session they were asked to write about difficult experiences and realize that others might be going through similar things, most of the writing focused on themselves and personal experiences without comparing them to the broader social situation. This shows that understanding this concept still takes more time and practice.

On the other hand, the *mindfulness* aspect shows quite visible development. In the third session, students learn to recognize negative feelings without avoiding them, but also not to let them dominate themselves. This is shown by expressions from AEs and EDs who begin to convey that they learn not to suppress emotions, but also not to put them on others.

This is in line with the understanding of *mindfulness* according to Neff, (2011), which is the attitude of accepting and being aware of suffering without identifying too much with these emotions.

The development in each of these aspects is inseparable from the dynamics of the group formed during the intervention process. Initially, some students were hesitant and tended to be silent. However, as the session progressed, they began to show openness and began to encourage each other. For example, when one of the students reads his or her writing in a trembling voice, the other student responds with applause or other supportive expressions. This dynamic creates a sense of security and togetherness in the group. This condition is very important because in a supportive atmosphere, students feel more comfortable to explore and express deeper emotions. In this case, it can be seen that the success of *expressive writing* interventions in the group guidance setting is also influenced by the emotional attachment that is built among group members (Hartanti, 2022).

One concrete example of such strong emotional dynamics occurred in the first session by focusing on the aspect of *self-kindness*. When students wrote a message for themselves, six out of eight students cried. This reaction shows that *expressive writing* touches the deepest part of their feelings. They not only write, but also feel, remember, and process emotional experiences that have been suppressed. One of the statements that describes the depth of emotion was delivered by an AP subject, in his statement "Don't always compare yourself to others who look better than you. Don't assume that they'll fully understand your feelings. You are you, and they are them. Such comparisons will only make you feel the weakest and despair easily. They just see you as someone who always smiles as if you don't have any problems, even though they don't know what's really going on behind it all."

The emotional reaction in the form of crying is one of the indicators of the success of *expressive writing* techniques in facilitating the cathartic process of students. The six students who cried showed an emotional release that had been suppressed. They feel relieved, lighter, and calmer after writing their hearts into an *expressive writing* sheet. Emotions arise not only from sadness, but also from feelings of relief, pride, and recognition of his struggle. These findings prove that *expressive writing* is not just a writing practice, but a very meaningful psychological channeling process. This is because *expressive writing* helps individuals understand and describe emotional experiences more clearly which can ultimately strengthen emotional regulation, reduce psychological burden, and improve overall mental well-being (Zhang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the students' expressions in each session showed different emotional dynamics. At the first meeting, students' writing tends to be very emotional, depicting deep feelings and strong reflections on past experiences. On the other hand, in the second and third meetings, students' writing tends to be more narrative, descriptive, and solution-oriented. This shows that the first session helps students vent emotions that have been suppressed. The subsequent sessions then lead students to understand and accept those feelings. In other words, *expressive writing* can help a person to be more honest with their emotions and rearrange them in a healthier way. This is in line with a study conducted by Baikie & Wilhelm, (2018) showing that *expressive writing* can help a person rearrange their thoughts and feelings that were originally irregular into a more coherent and meaningful story. This process makes it easier for individuals to understand what they are experiencing, reduces the burden of accumulated emotions, and supports overall mental health.

This entire process is well facilitated through the stages of systematic *expressive writing* techniques. *Expressive writing* is carried out in four stages, namely *recognition*, *examination*, *juxtaposition*, and *application*. The *recognition* stage helps students start the writing process by expressing their current feelings. The *examination* stage becomes a space to explore painful past experiences. The *juxtaposition* stage provides space for reflection and feedback from the group, while the *application* stage encourages students to apply the messages or values found during the writing process into their daily lives (Salam et al., 2024). These four stages complement each other and form a complete emotional learning process.

Thus, group guidance with *expressive writing techniques* has been proven to be effective in developing *self-compassion* in vocational school students as shown by the increase in quantitative scores as well as students' emotional and behavioral dynamics during the intervention process. This technique not only helps students recognize, express and manage emotions that have been hidden, but also builds a reflective attitude, self-acceptance, and empathy for themselves. These three aspects are an important foundation in strengthening students' emotional resilience and preventing the emergence of *self-harm* behavior. The success of this intervention is also influenced by the active involvement of students, supportive group dynamics, and systematic and contextual engineering stages. Therefore, *expressive writing* deserves to be implemented more widely in guidance and counseling services in schools as a prevention strategy and deep character development while still taking into account the specific characteristics and needs of students.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that group guidance services with *expressive writing techniques* are effective in developing *self-compassion* in preventing *self-harm behavior* in vocational school students. This success was shown through an increase in self-compassion scores in most participants as well as strengthening *aspects of self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness* facilitated through supportive group dynamics. This technique provides a safe space for students to express and reflect on emotional experiences in a healthy manner thus forming an attitude of empathy and self-acceptance. Thus, *expressive writing* can be a relevant strategy to be implemented in counseling guidance services in schools, especially in efforts to prevent *self-harm* among vocational school adolescents. The researcher is further advised to expand the number of participants, add control groups, and explore more deeply the strategy of strengthening *the common humanity dimension* which tends to develop more slowly in vocational school students.

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