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# **“BEING OPTIMISTIC” AS PREVENTION PROGRAM TO DEPRESSION TENDENCY IN COLLEGE STUDENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Mild depression is common in young age, specially college students who deal with different roles and tasks during the period. The research was aimed to find out the effect of program “Being Optimistic” to depression tendency in college students at Psychology Faculty, University of Semarang.

The instrument of this research was BDI (Beck Depression Inventory) to know depression tendency level. There were 48 psychology students who participated in this study. The effectiveness of “Being Optimistic” program as independent variable was shown from the differences between pretest ( $O_1$ ) and posttest ( $O_2$ ). Correlated data t-test / paired-sample t-test were used to analyze the data.

30 (62,51%) out of 48 participants showed mild depression to moderate depression. The statistical analysis shows that  $t = 6,707$  with the significance level of  $p = 0,000$  ( $p < 0,1$ ). It indicates that the program “Being Optimistic” has a very significant effect on depression tendency in college students. There were differences between BDI scores from 18,59 to 10,24 showing that program “Being Optimistic” can be used as prevention to depression tendency in college students.

**Key Words: Program “Being Optimistic”, Depression Tendency**

## **A. BACKGROUND**

Depression is a normal response to various stresses of life (Atkinson, 1991), and would be considered abnormal when out of the ordinary and continued until the moments when most people are able to recover. In environmental conditions and increasingly filled with events that provide stress, it is easy for people experiencing depression. Geisner (2006) revealed that depression has long been recognized as a major concern for medical practitioners.

Feelings of depression is a common enough experience among students. It is estimated that about one out of four American college students suffer from some symptoms of depression (Herber & Runyon, 1984). Citing the results of Beck & Young study (Harber & Runyon, 1984), it is said that three-quarters of all students felt depressed for some time during his studies. A recent survey by the American College Health Association was administered nationally to 47,000 students; results indicated that 45% of the students were depressed to the point of having trouble functioning. Data from the Anxiety Screening conducted last year with 130 Fort Lewis College students indicated that 12% qualified as having a Depressive Disorder and 25% qualified as having Generalized Anxiety ([www.fortlewiscollege.com](http://www.fortlewiscollege.com)).

This can happen regarding many problems related to the success of students in completing their studies and opening up opportunities for students to experience symptoms of depression due to various problems that may arise. Such as adaptation to circumstances campus, a task which accumulates, the demand for good value, and so forth. It is also concluded by Allgower et al (2001), that depression and reduced psychological well-being is a major health problem in young people. According Reifman & Dunkel-Schetter (in Allgower et al, 2001), symptoms of depression and anxiety are of particular concern to the student and associated with low academic performance and low participation in campus activities. Researchers from WestEd (R & D Alert, 2003) found the data that educational places will have a high level of academic achievement when students have a factor of lower health risks and high protective factors.

Citing Beck's view that depression is a continuum, Geisner (2006) states that treatments are needed in all levels. More specifically, he states that mild depressive symptoms are less responded to handle, then they would be a risk for the development of a major depressive episode and have other consequences as a result of a depressive mood. This is supported by Arnau et al (2001), that the detection of depression in patients is very important because 50-75% of individuals who are looking treatment to overcome her depression disorder, only 16-23% actually went to a mental health practitioner. Unfortunately, because depression often goes undetected at first, more than half of patients with major depressive disorder is not treated. Patients with untreated depression showed a significant functional decline and morbidity and high mortality exceeding the average, and tend to be high users of medical services. The description above indicates the need for preventive efforts in dealing with mild depression. In this case, students, as previously stated above, are easy to experience symptoms of depression, requiring efforts to prevent in order that the disruption they face can be overcome and do not develop into more severe disorders.

Individuals with the history of low or mild depression can be helped by an enhanced motivation approach. One of them is by changing their mindset. As expressed by Stanley (2002), one of the most prospective findings of psychology is that we can overcome depression by learning to stop pessimistic, stop thinking that does not help, and began optimistic, hopeful thinking.

Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in recognizing how the effectiveness of optimism development programs as a prevention against depression in college students. Therefore, the problem can be formulated as follows. "Does the program of Being Optimistic have the effect on the decline of depression tendency in college students?"

## **B. THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **1. Depression**

Depression is a normal response to various stresses of life. Depression is considered abnormal when out of the ordinary and continued until the moment where most people are able to recover (Atkinson, 1991). The characteristics are; no hope, heartbreak, helplessness, excessive powerlessness, always thinking about self-drawback and sense of meaningless.

According to Beck (1985), depression is a "primary mood disorder" or as an "affective disorder".

Then Beck looked at depression in the following components.

1. Depression is a prolonged sadness and an apathetic mood (affective component)
2. Depression is a wrong way of thinking in looking at reality outside and within themselves so that it forms a negative self-concept that continues to feelings of low self-esteem (cognitive component).
3. Depression is a disorder of physiological functions; causing sleeplessness and loss of appetite and sexual desire (physiological component)
4. Depression is the loss of the ability for proper functioning reasonably as well as the loss of impetus and energy to act (behavioral component)

Rathus & Nevid (1991) states that people who experience depression, in general, have disorders which include emotion, motivation, functional and behavioral movement and cognition. Beck (1985) considers depression disorder as a continuity, so much regarded as quantitative (there are differences in the level and degree of symptom) rather than qualitative (the presence or absence of symptoms). The differences, between people who suffer with depression, are not only on the range and degree of the presence or absence of symptoms that arise.

From the description above, it can be concluded that depression is an affective or mood disorder that includes the components of affective, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral.

### **2. Optimism**

Optimism is a style of explanation (how someone explains something to himself), and also an attitude (how someone feels about something). Behavioral components on optimism is a complex result of thoughts and emotions. In general terms, optimism is the belief in the possibility of positive outcomes (Kerley, 2005).

Optimism is one predictor of a person's subjective well-being (Compton, 2005). In general, Compton said that individuals who are more optimistic about his future will be happier and more satisfied in life. Someone, who thinks of himself in a positive way, believes that he/she can control his/her important aspects of life, and successful in social interaction, will more likely look at the future with hope and positive possibilities.

Optimistic often has an effect on physical health status as indicated by lower health problems. In addition, positive expectations do not only improve mood but they also give better coping strategies when experiencing stress. Individual differences in optimism plays an important role in the adjustment to suppressing life events (Brisette

& Scheier, 2002). Optimistic can be a psychological characteristic that has a high benefit associated with good mood, persistence, achievement, and physical health (Peterson, 2000).

Seligman (in Compton, 2005) reveals that a person can learn to be more optimistic by giving attention to how he/she describes an event in life to themselves. He defines this process as "learned optimism". In his theory, Seligman said that if we focus on positive and possible things, we can learn to respond to stressors with an optimistic attitude and full of hope.

Pessimistic provides an important explanation of depression and learning optimistic gives an understanding in coping with helplessness and depression (Clayton Tucker-Ladd & the Self-Help Foundation, 1996). Stanley (2002) conducted a study in line with Seligman's research on optimistic. In his research, Stanley found that when people learn that they can not avoid sources of stress, they become passive and helpless. They do not act to avoid sources of stress although the action is possible and easy to do. The other fact was found that about 33% of them do not learn to be helpless. They have fortitude in miserable situations and do not surrender or act passively.

At this point, investigators began trying to discover what makes the subject able to survive (Stanley, 2002). They found that the key when asking subjects to explain the circumstances when they were facing a miserable situation. Individuals who described a negative situation with ....

- Permanent - "Everything is not going to get better".
- Pervasive - "My whole life was destroyed".
- Personal - "It is all my fault".  
..... became helpless and passive  
Individuals who described a negative situation with ....
- Temporary - "Everything will get better".
- Specific - "The situation is bad but most of my life is OK".
- Circumstantial - "This issue is merely an unfavorable situation. It is not my fault".  
..... individuals who are optimistic and are actively trying to make the situation better.

Stanley (2002) suggested that learning to be helpless has consequences in one's life. Research on the helplessness found that pessimistic individuals become more prone to depression, low achievement in work, to be sick more frequently, and experiencing less enjoyable life when compared with optimistic individuals.

If a person learns to be helpless so he can also learn not to be helpless. The different terms, if a person learns to become depressed then he can also learn not to become depressed (Stanley, 2002). Depression is the result of habitual ways of thinking throughout life. If we try to change the habit of thinking, we will be able to cure depression (Seligman in Stanley, 2002). Seligman and colleagues (Compton, 2005) had developed a program to improve the optimistic by using role play and story telling to recognize differences of positive and negative way of thinking and changing negative attributions to the events passed.

According to Stanley (2002), this is in line with the research results showing that both medication and cognitive therapy, each of which can help to overcome depression. Cognitive therapy is a psychological treatment focused on transforming how a person thinks about himself, his world, and future. It means, we can help depression by changing our thinking from pessimistic to optimistic. In line with the findings of Andrews and Szabo (2002) who found evidence that cognitive strategies can be used to treat depression. This is supported also by the research results conducted by Brissette &

Scheier (2003), which states that individuals with increasingly optimistic related to increasingly lower in stress and depression, and increased perception of social support he received.

Skott (2005) concluded that the optimism and resilience related to the success of learning, good health, and with success in the workplace and other aspects in life. Then, he added that the factors affecting the optimistic and resilience are found in the relations, events and settings of everyday life, and can be effected through schools, families and wider community. Thus, to improve optimistic in students, it can be done in the form of psychological education provided in campus settings.

From the description above, it can be concluded that in dealing with mild depression, it can be used the way by identifying and changing negative thoughts, pessimistic, and helpless, into positive thoughts, optimistic and full of hope. Related to the matter, prevention efforts to depression can be done by increasing optimistic among college students.

### 3. Hypothesis

The hypothesis proposed in this study are as follows.

H<sub>0</sub> : There is no effect of the program "Being Optimistic" on depression tendency in college students

H<sub>1</sub> : There is effect of the program "Being Optimistic" on depression tendency in college students

### C. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this research is quantitative research methods, where the data obtained in the quantitative form of numbers, which will be analyzed statistically (Seniati et al, 2005). This type of research is experimental research that will examine the causal relation and not only view the relation between variable. According to Solso and MacLin (in Seniati et al, 2005), experimental research is the investigation in which at least one variable is manipulated to study causal relations.

The variable used in this study are depression tendency as the dependent variable, and the program "Being Optimistic" as the independent variable. The Depression Tendency In Students is affective or mood disorder that includes the components of affective, cognitive, physiological, and behavioral, experienced by students. The program "Being a Optimistic" is a prevention strategy to depression tendencies in students by helping them develop positive ways of thinking and forming an optimistic orientation in their lives.

The research design used was the Pretest-Posttest of One Group Design. In this design, at the beginning of the study, the assessments were carried out on the dependent variable already owned by the subject. After a manipulation, re-assessment was performed on the dependent variable with the same instrument (Seniati et al, 2005). It can be described in the following chart.

Assessment (O<sub>1</sub>) → Manipulation (X) → Assessment (O<sub>2</sub>)

Based on the outline above, this research will assess the depression at the beginning of the research and then it was assessed again with the same instrument after the subjects received the program "Being Optimistic".the effectiveness or impact of such interventions as the independent variable on the dependent variable is seen from the

difference between the pretest ( $O_1$ ) and posttest ( $O_2$ ). To be more convincing in the conclusions, the statistical analysis of correlated data t-test / paired-sample t-test can be used (Seniati et al, 2005). If there is a difference between pretest scores and posttest scores in which posttest scores were significantly higher, it can be concluded that the program "Being Optimistic" has the effect on the tendency of depression in college students.

Research participants used in this study were the students of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Semarang who were depressed. The previous participants will be screened in advance to see the level of depression.

The method of data collection was the depression assessment scale of Beck Depression Inventory (BDI).

### **1. Research Procedure**

The research was conducted in the form of experiments in which the participants were given a course as independent variable to assess the effect or effectiveness on the dependent variable. In this study, the independent variable is a program called "Being Optimistic". Here is the description and the implementation of the program.

#### **THE PROGRAM "BEING OPTIMISTIC"**

Depression is the result of habitual ways of thinking throughout life. If we try to change the habit of thinking, we will be able to cure depression (Seligman in Stanley, 2002). Therefore, the efforts to overcome depression in college students can be done by turning their ways of thinking to be more positive and optimistic.

The Program "Being a Optimistic" is an intervention strategy by developing a positive way of thinking and forming an optimistic orientation in life. In this program, students are taught on how to recognize the differences in the positive and negative way of thinking and changing negative attributions to the events they experience by using interactive discussions, role play, story telling, and expressive writing.

#### **Principles of Change How to Being Optimistic Thinking**

Seligman (Compton, 2005) explains how to eliminate pessimistic thoughts and to enhance optimism and hope by ABCDE model. The explanations of this model are as follows.

A: the events that stimulate woes

B: the belief that automatically appear in the response to the events

C: the consequences that usually appear because of the belief

The model describes the following sequence: when an event occurs (A); it is interpreted and gives specific meaning (B), and because of the way how to mean, emotional responses and behaviors will emerge (C).

Emotional responses are often negative when the belief is pessimistic or unrealistic. Optimistic or expectations can be an emotional response if individuals deny or argue the belief that usually occurs (D) with more hopeful or more realistic meaning

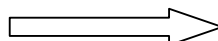
If it is successful, the individual will be more energetic (E).

Change of mindset is done by looking at pessimistic expressions converted into more optimistic expression and thoughts. In accordance with Stanley on the characteristics of optimism and pessimism (2002), it can be described as follows:

Individuals who describe negative situations:		Individuals who describe negative situations:
▪ Permanent - "Everything is not going to get better".		▪ Temporary - "Everything will get better".
▪ Pervasive - "My whole life was destroyed".		▪ Specific - "The situation is bad but most of my life OK".
▪ Personal - "Everything is my fault".		▪ Circumstantial - "This issue is merely a state that is not profitable. Not my fault".



pessimistic and passive



optimistic and active



In other words, it can be concluded that the program "Being Optimistic" change negative thought into more positive mindset patterns so as to change the negative reactions to positive. By changing this thought pattern, individuals who initially felt helpless and pessimistic can change their negative attributions to the events they experienced so that they become more optimistic in looking at themselves, their world and their future.

## 2. Data Analysis Method

The data analysis was performed using the computer program of SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions), statistical analysis of correlated data t-test / paired-sample t-test. t-test on one population will test whether the population mean is equal to a certain value, and the paired t-test requires two related samples (Santoso, 2000). Therefore, this study will use paired t-test to see whether the interventions can be effective, by using the data before and after the intervention.

## D. RESEARCH RESULTS

The research subjects were the students of Faculty of Psychology, University of Semarang, who were in 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester. BDI scale deployment had been done to 48 students of 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester. The number of research participants were determined 30 people; the students who had total value of 11 and higher, which means they were the subject that had undergone depression tendency and even depressed. After the participant was determined, the participants made an agreement to join the intervention with the assurance of confidentiality. From 30 students who met the characteristics of research subjects, five people had stated their unwillingness to join the research experiments. Hence, the number of participants at the beginning of the research were 25 people. However, the participants who can attend the entire program completely were only 17 people. Concerning the method of data analysis that allows to perform calculations with relatively small number (under 30), then this is not a problem.

Statistical analysis used was correlated data t-test/paired-sample t-test with SPSS for Windows program. In the BDI scores of the participants in the research, the calculation of t count = 6.707 and the significance level of  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.1$ ). Based on the results of data analysis, it shows that the research hypothesis is accepted, and it means the program "Being Optimistic" has a very significant effect on reducing the tendency of mild depression in college students. The results are also supported by the

data on pre-test and post-test means of BDI which showed a decline in the rate of depression from 18.59 to 10.24.

## **E. DISCUSSION**

From the results of screening conducted to morning regular students of 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester, Faculty of Psychology, University of Semarang, it was found that 48 students who filled in BDI, 30 (62.51%) of them were depressed. This shows the quite worrying prevalence because more than half of the research subjects, especially in mood disorders, which would affect not only academic but also the personal of students concerned as a whole. These results also support the statement of Herber and Runyon (1984) which states that feelings of depression is a common enough experience among the students. If it can not be anticipated earlier, it will cause increasingly serious problem in the future.

The results of  $t$  count = 6.707 with a significance level of  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.1$ ). Based on the results of data, the research hypothesis is accepted, it means that the program "Being Optimistic" has a very significant effect on the tendency of mild depression in college students. The effect of this program is a decline in rates of depression among college students. The results are supported by the data of means in pre-test and post-test showing a decline in rates of depression, from 18.59 to 10.24. The results of this study show that the program "Being Optimistic" can be used as one of the therapy to lower the levels of depression in students, which can also be used as the form of prevention or improvement of depression symptoms in college students. More precisely, the program "Being Optimistic" can be used as a prevention for depression tendency for students.

As previously described, individuals with history of low depression or have mild depression can be helped by an enhanced motivation approaches. One of them is by changing their mindset. Program "Being a Optimistic" is one form of prevention or intervention to change the mindset of individuals who initially using negative explanatory styles to be more positive. In line with the opinion of Stanley (2002), the program shows that we can overcome depression by learning to stop pessimistic, stop thinking that does not help, and begin optimistic, hopeful thinking.

Improved optimistic is very important because it is a psychological characteristic having high benefit associated with good mood, persistence, achievement, and physical health (Peterson, 2000). With improved optimistic owned by individual, it will be able to provide positive expectations that affect mood enhancement and better coping strategies when facing stress. As stated by Brissette and Scheier (2002), more optimistic individuals can solve their problems effectively compared to those who are pessimistic.

The process of change that occurred in the program was done through a four forms of the programs that, mainly, is to encourage participants that an optimistic attitude as a very favorable psychological characteristics can be studied in the same way as the feelings of helplessness (pessimistic) they face today. It was started with insights through interactive discussions, followed by a role play, story telling and expressive writing are the skills given to participants so that they can change the style of explanation when they face inconvenient situations or even misery of negative thinking to be more positive . As expressed by Stanley (2002), that it is found on the subject who is able to withstand the stresses are those who can describe a negative situation with a more optimistic explanatory styles. Changing these habits can lower the levels of individual depression.

The key word of this program is to change the minds of pessimistic to optimistic. By recognizing these differences in ways of thinking and change for the better, it will make a person think about himself, his world, and his future with a better way as well. It has been indicated by the difference between BDI pretest and posttest scores in which the posttest scores are significantly higher. It can be concluded that the intervention of the program "Being Optimistic" can reduce the symptoms of depression in college students.

Experiment evaluation results also show the data supporting the research results that the program "Being Optimistic" can change the mood and style of explanation of the events experienced to be better, so that participants can feel the beneficial and useful effect. The calculation of the evaluation was done by looking at the greatest percentage of answers in each of the statements. This change was apparent from the question on how often they experienced feelings of sadness before the program was done. The results show the largest percentage of the answer stating "often" (47.06%), which later changed to "hardly ever", was the largest percentage of the answers (58.82%). In contrast, the frequency of happy feelings increased after doing the program, i.e. from 29.41% with the answer "ongoing" to 47.06% with the answer "almost always". A total of 35.29% of participants revealed that they generally can reveal personal experiences and considerably can release emotions that can relieve them.

Changes also occur in the decreased frequency of negative thoughts that arise, from "much" (41.18%) to be "little" (35.29%); and style of thinking in a more positive way, i.e. from "little" (35.29%) to "much" (52.94%). A total of 52.94% of participants also felt that this program also had significantly changed their style of explanation in regard to events in life to better direction, and 52.94% of participants felt the program had significantly made them be more optimistic in viewing life.

All participants felt the benefit of this program. In details, 17.65% of them stated quite a lot of benefits, 47.06% for many benefits, and so many benefits at 35.29%. In general, the results of this evaluation has shown that participants can feel the positive effects mainly in their increased optimistic that can change their mood and style of explanation for life events they experienced. Apparently, after the program had been completed, BDI posttest results showed a reduction in the rates of depression in participants.

## **F. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

From the results of this study, it is recognized that the program "Being Optimistic" has a very significant effect on the tendency of depression in college students. The comparison results of pretest and posttest scores of depression tendency confirms this by showing a decline in levels of depression. Thus, it can be concluded that the program "Being Optimistic" can be used as a prevention of depression tendency in university students.

For further research, it is expected to consider other factors that affect the occurrence of depression in college students. The discovery in this study suggests that the role of family and friends are the factors that determine the occurrence of mood disorders in research participants. It is expected, with further research, mainly to examine other factors that affect depression, can add to the insights of depression in college students.

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## .Certificate of Attendance.

This is to certify that :

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