

# Using Expressive Writing in Group Counselling to Reduce Insecure Behaviour Among Fatherless Students

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## ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a critical phase in identity formation, which is strongly influenced by interpersonal interactions, including relationships with parents. The absence of a father figure can lead to emotional and social voids in adolescents, often resulting in feelings of worthlessness and the emergence of insecure behaviour. To evaluate the effectiveness of expressive writing in group counselling for reducing insecure behaviour among fatherless students in Grade 10 Computer and Network Engineering students at SMK Mandiri. This research employed a quantitative method with a pre-experimental one-group Pre-Test and post-test design and a purposive sampling technique. A total of 8 fatherless students who exhibited high levels of insecurity were selected as participants. Data were collected using validated fatherless and insecure behaviour scales. The results of the study, based on the paired sample t-test analysis, showed a significant value for Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000 < 0.05. These findings indicate that the expressive writing technique in group counselling is effective in reducing insecure behaviour among fatherless students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period full of challenges, during which individuals begin to form their identity and build self-confidence. According to Erik Erikson's theory, adolescence, typically ranging from ages 12 to 18, is marked by the process of identity formation through social interaction, both with peers and authority figures such as parents. In this context, the father figure plays a crucial role in helping adolescents develop a positive self-concept [1].

In shaping a child's positive self-concept, each component plays a vital role in influencing their sense of worth, which ultimately leads to either a positive or negative self-evaluation. Elmanora et al. [2] state that strong emotional attachment between parents and children contributes significantly to the development of self-esteem and a positive self-view during adolescence. When the father figure is absent, adolescents are at risk of experiencing

emotional and social voids, potentially leading to feelings of worthlessness and the emergence of insecure behaviour.

Previous studies have shown that the absence of a father can severely impact a child's mental condition, leading to feelings of anger, loneliness, and insecurity during their development, as well as shame due to not having similar developmental experiences as their peers [3]. Research by Nurul [4] also shows that the absence of a father can lead to low self-confidence, emotional instability, poor academic performance, and fear of the opposite sex, often due to reasons such as death, divorce, labour migration, or emotional neglect.

A report by the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs in the book "Our Father(less) Story: A Portrait of 12 Indonesian Fatherless Children" noted that Indonesia ranks third among countries with the highest prevalence of fatherless conditions[5]. In Indonesia's patriarchal culture, the father is often perceived as the main breadwinner, while the mother is seen as the caregiver. This strengthens the belief that the father's presence has a substantial impact on a child's emotional and social development [6].

A father's involvement in childcare can influence a child's awareness through perception. This perception shapes attitudes and behaviours toward others, internalising into personality and identity. For boys, the perception of the father figure helps shape masculine identity, while for girls, it helps establish a positive model of adult men [7].

This study was conducted at SMK Mandiri, located at Jl. Datuk Kabu No.99, Bandar Khalipah, Kec. Percut Sei Tuan, Kabupaten Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, where initial observations identified fatherless students, particularly in the Grade 10 Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program. Based on interviews with the school counsellor and fatherless students, it was found that these students often engage in self-harm, withdraw from others, show low academic achievement, and frequently compare themselves to their peers, academically and socially.

Research by A'yuni & Setiawati [8] at SMK PGRI 1 Tangerang found that students often experience feelings of insecurity, leading to anxiety within the school environment. This condition is triggered by academic competition, physical appearance, family background, and peer relationships. This phenomenon highlights the urgent need for strategic interventions to help students manage internal fears and worries.

Expressive writing is a therapeutic technique that allows individuals to express emotions through writing, thereby managing stress and improving emotional stability. It helps individuals achieve physical well-being, mental clarity, and behavioural improvement [9]. Expressive writing can be self-initiated or therapist-guided and has been identified as a relevant intervention for fatherless students. Group counselling is a method used to address problems collaboratively, where a counsellor facilitates group dynamics to guide clients toward perspective shifts and healing [10].

Expressive writing consists of four stages: (1) Initial Write – where participants freely express their burdens, worries, threats, or traumatic experiences; (2) Writing Exercise – which focuses on expressing hopes and self-belief; (3) Feedback – participants reread their writings to gain deeper self-awareness and reflection; and (4) Application to the Self – encouraging independent practice of expressive writing and reflection on necessary changes [11].

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This study will implement four sessions based on these stages, following the model successfully applied by Wulandari [12], who demonstrated that a structured approach to expressive writing helped participants build positive narratives and resilience. The phased implementation of expressive writing has been shown to release negative emotions, foster self-awareness, and encourage positive behavioural changes.

Yudianto [13] highlighted the effectiveness of group counselling in boosting student self-confidence by offering a platform for open discussion and mutual support. Typically involving 8–10 members, group counselling fosters an environment of care, acceptance, and expression, reducing students' discomfort and isolation.

The group counselling process involves four phases: (1) Formation – introducing group activities and fostering engagement; (2) Transition – addressing feelings of doubt or distrust; (3) Activity – discussing problems actively; and (4) Termination – concluding with reflection and feedback [14].

Hadiwinarto [15] found that group counselling using expressive writing significantly improved self-acceptance among students from broken homes, with average post-test scores showing meaningful improvement. Similarly, expressive writing helps adolescents manage negative emotions and improve psychological well-being. Group counselling also encourages openness, social acceptance, and emotional support.

However, studies specifically integrating expressive writing within group counselling to reduce insecure behaviour among fatherless students are still scarce. Most research only highlights general psychological issues among children without fathers or discusses insecure behaviour without considering family background [16]. Students who grow up without a father figure tend to have low self-confidence, social anxiety, and a tendency to compare themselves to others—traits commonly associated with insecure behaviour [17].

Therefore, this study aims to explore the application of expressive writing techniques in group counselling for fatherless students to reduce insecure behaviour. The focus is on students who display signs of insecurity, such as high levels of self-doubt, a tendency to compare themselves negatively with others, difficulty accepting their weaknesses, and social anxiety in daily interactions.

**Research Question:** How effective is the implementation of expressive writing techniques in group counselling to reduce insecure behaviour among fatherless students?

This study aims to evaluate whether group counselling using the expressive writing technique can effectively reduce insecure behaviour among fatherless students. The results of this research are expected to provide an alternative and practical strategy for guidance and counselling teachers in addressing the emotional problems of fatherless students, as well as contribute to the development of more inclusive counselling services that focus on students' emotional well-being.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental one-group Pre-Test-Post-Test design. In this design, a pre-test is administered before the treatment, followed by a post-test after the treatment. According to Sugiyono [18], the one-group

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experimental method involves only one group and can take several forms, such as the one-group Pre-Test-Post-Test design. This allows for more accurate measurement of the treatment effects by comparing the participants' conditions before and after the intervention.

In research, a population is required as the source of data. The population refers to the entire group within a specific area and timeframe that meets certain predefined characteristics and allows the researcher to draw generalizable conclusions [19]. The population of this study consisted of all 10th-grade students in the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program at SMK Mandiri, totalling 83 students. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing specifically on students who were identified as fatherless and exhibited high levels of insecure behaviour based on the results of a preliminary questionnaire. Based on this screening, eight students from the 10th-grade TKJ class met the criteria and agreed to participate in all counselling sessions. The sample size was also adjusted to accommodate time constraints during the research implementation.

The instruments used for data collection included a 42-item fatherlessness scale and a 9-item insecure behaviour scale, both adapted from the research by Zuniyanti K. [20]. These instruments were designed to measure the level of fatherlessness and insecure behaviour based on several indicators. The indicators for the fatherlessness scale included: (1) feelings about the father, (2) perceptions of father's involvement, (3) physical relationship with the father, and (4) conception of father's involvement. The indicators for the insecure behaviour scale included self-acceptance and self-respect. The questionnaires used a Likert scale that included both favourable (positive) and unfavourable (negative) statements.

The reliability of the fatherlessness questionnaire showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.968, which is considered excellent and highly reliable. Meanwhile, the insecure behaviour scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.804, which is also considered reliable.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0 for Windows. The steps of data analysis included descriptive statistics such as the mean to provide an overall view of the pre-test scores, standard deviation to assess data dispersion and consistency, and frequencies and percentages to calculate occurrences within specific categories. Prior to analysis, prerequisite tests were conducted, including tests of normality and homogeneity, to ensure the data were normally distributed. Once the data met these assumptions, a paired sample t-test was performed to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores [21].

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Results**

##### *Respondent Characteristics*

The population in this study consisted of tenth-grade students in the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program at SMK Swasta Mandiri, which comprises three classes. The level of insecure behaviour among fatherless students was determined based on the results of questionnaires distributed to all respondents. The research participants were

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selected based on the identification of fatherless students who demonstrated a high level of insecure behaviour.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Fatherlessness

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
<i>FATHERLESS</i>	83	62,00	205,00	109,6867	34,84318
Valid N (listwise)	83				

Based on the results presented in Table 1, the descriptive analysis of fatherlessness shows that the total number of respondents was 83 students. The minimum score was 62.00, the maximum score was 205.00, the mean score was 109.6, and the standard deviation was 34.9. These findings place the fatherlessness level in the moderate category.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Insecure Behaviour

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
<i>INSECURE BEHAVIOR</i>	83	9,00	29,00	19,0241	4,65119
Valid N (listwise)	83				

Based on the results of the descriptive analysis of insecure behaviour using SPSS Statistics 25, it was found that the total number of respondents was 83 students. The minimum score obtained was 9.00, the maximum score was 29.00, the mean score was 19.02, and the standard deviation was 4.65.

Following the calculation of the mean and standard deviation, the next step was to classify the data. According to Sugiyono [22], data classification is determined using three categories:

$$\text{High} = X \geq \mu + SD$$

$$\text{Moderate} = \mu - SD \leq X < \mu + SD$$

$$\text{Low} = X < \mu - SD$$

Note:

X = the obtained score

$\mu$  = theoretical mean (number of items  $\times$  midpoint score of each item)

SD = standard deviation ( $1/6 \times (\text{maximum score} - \text{minimum score})$ )

Table 3. Categorisation of Fatherlessness Scores

Category	Score range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	$x < 74.84352$	11	13,3 %
Moderate	$74.84352 \leq x < 144.52988$	59	71,1 %
High	$x \geq 144.52988$	13	15,7 %
Total		83	100,00%

Based on the results presented in Table 3, the categorisation of fatherlessness scores shows that the majority of respondents fall within the moderate category. This indicates that most Grade 10 students in the Computer and Network Engineering (TKJ) program at SMK Mandiri received a relatively good level of paternal involvement or presence, with 71.1% classified in the moderate category, close to the optimal level.

Table 4. Categorisation of Insecure Behaviour Scores

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Precentage
Low	$x < 14,37291$	17	20,5 %
Medium	$14,37291 \leq x < 23,67529$	51	61,4 %
Hight	$x \geq 23,67529$	15	18,1 %
Total		83	100,00%

Based on Table 4, the categorisation of insecure behaviour scores shows that the majority of respondents fell into the moderate category. This indicates that the students in the TKJ program generally demonstrated a fairly good level of self-acceptance, with 61.4% falling within the moderate range. Although the categorisation results revealed that 13 respondents had high levels of fatherlessness and 15 respondents showed high levels of insecure behaviour, only 8 students met the criteria for participation. These students were classified as fatherless and also demonstrated high levels of insecure behaviour, thus qualifying to receive group counselling services.

#### *Pre-Test and Post-Test Data Description*

This study was conducted with 8 fatherless students who exhibited a high level of insecure behaviour, as determined by the results of the initial questionnaire. The intervention, which consisted of expressive writing techniques delivered through group counselling, was implemented over four sessions. Measurements of insecure behaviour were carried out both before and after the intervention using the Insecure Behaviour Scale. The results are presented in the following table.

Table 5. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-Test Results

Partisipan	PreTest	Category	Post-Test	Category
NA	26	High	20	Medium
NR	25	High	19	Medium
AG	25	High	20	Medium
RA	25	High	21	Medium
NS	29	High	22	Medium
MS	25	High	19	Medium
FE	24	High	16	Medium
NI	28	High	18	Medium
Mean	25,88	High	19,38	Medium

Based on the results in Table 5, a comparison of pre-test and post-test scores for 8 fatherless students with high levels of insecure behaviour shows that all participants initially

fell into the high-score category, with a mean pre-test score of 25.88. After the intervention, the average post-test score decreased to 19.38, placing it in the moderate category. This change indicates that the intervention, expressive writing techniques conducted in group counselling, had a positive impact in reducing insecure behaviour among the fatherless students who participated in this study.

*Assumption Testing*

**Normality Tets**

The normality test is a prerequisite test used to determine whether the data in a study follow a normal distribution. The following decision criteria are used in the analysis:

1. If the significance value (Sig.) is greater than 0.05, the data are considered normally distributed, meaning the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is rejected.
2. If the significance value (Sig.) is less than 0.05, the data are considered not normally distributed, meaning  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted.

Table 6. Normality Test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Score Pre-test	0,319	8	0,016	0,825	8	0,052
Score Post-test	0,170	8	.200	0,969	8	0,893

Based on the normality test results for insecure behaviour, the significance (Sig.) values for each variable were greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data are normally distributed.

**Homogeneity Test**

The homogeneity test is used to assess the equality of two variances, aiming to determine whether the data distribution is homogeneous or not. This test is conducted by comparing the variances using SPSS software. The decision-making criteria are as follows:

1. If the Sig. Value > 0.05, the data is considered homogeneous, meaning the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is accepted and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is rejected.
2. If the Sig. Value < 0.05, the data is considered not homogeneous, meaning the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted.

Table 7. Homogeneity Test

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on the Mean	0,004	1	14	0,953

Based on the homogeneity test results, the obtained significance value was Sig. = 0.953, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data meet the assumption of homogeneity, and further analysis can proceed with hypothesis testing.

### *Hypothesis Testing Results*

The hypothesis testing in this study employed the Paired Sample t-Test, which is used to determine whether there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the same group before and after receiving a particular treatment or intervention [23].

Table 8. Paired Sample t-Test

Paired Differences								
95% Confidence								
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
PRE TEST - POST TEST	6.500	1,852	0,0655	4,952	8,048	9,929	7	0,000

Based on the Paired Sample t-Test results presented above, there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores following the implementation of the expressive writing technique through group counselling. The test results showed a significant value for Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the expressive writing technique had a statistically significant effect on reducing insecure behaviour among the participants.

### **3.2. Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate a reduction in insecure behaviour among fatherless students following the implementation of group counselling using the expressive writing technique. This was evidenced by a significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, where the mean score of insecure behaviour decreased from 25.88 to 19.38 after the intervention. This result was further supported by the Paired Sample t-Test analysis, which yielded a significance value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), confirming that the observed changes reflected actual behavioural improvements rather than measurement error.

The decrease in insecure behaviour was closely related to the intervention delivered through four systematically structured group counselling sessions based on the stages of expressive writing. The first session focused on free writing to help students express emotional burdens and distressing personal experiences, and the second session aimed to enhance self-knowledge and personal aspirations to foster self-confidence. In the third session, students were encouraged to reread and reflect on their writings to build greater self-awareness. The fourth session served as a reflective evaluation to help students organise their thoughts and internalise healthier cognitive patterns.

Through this process, students were guided to shift their focus from perceived deficiencies to recognising their strengths. They began to construct more positive internal narratives, believing in their capabilities without being overly influenced by others' opinions, realistically assessing their limitations, and accepting weaknesses without self-blame. These abilities are key indicators of reduced insecurity, as noted by Sari et al. [24].

These findings are consistent with the expressive writing theory proposed by Pennebaker and Seagal [25], which asserts that expressive writing assists individuals in managing negative emotions, reducing stress, and enhancing self-awareness. Expressive writing that conveys genuine emotional reflections on real-life experiences can serve as a therapeutic medium for unexpressed thoughts and feelings, which, if suppressed, may adversely affect physical and mental health. During the writing process, students were able to express their thoughts and emotions freely without concern for grammatical rules, enabling greater openness and alleviating fear or anxiety. The group counselling process aimed to support students in achieving new levels of awareness and understanding of the challenges they faced.

This is in line with the study by Nadrah and Suwarjo [26], which concluded that expressive writing in group settings enables students to express emotional distress and increase their awareness of the problems they experience. Similarly, Amatullah [27] found that expressive writing in group counselling could improve self-disclosure, social acceptance, and emotional regulation among adolescents. These findings affirm the widespread and effective use of expressive writing therapy, particularly in processing emotional experiences to reduce depression symptoms.

Through group discussions, students also learn to listen, communicate, and appreciate different perspectives. Participants in group counselling sessions feel more accepted and supported by their peers. Throughout the counselling process, the facilitator fostered a climate of mutual encouragement, allowing students to feel emotionally supported in a more positive direction [28].

However, this study is not without limitations. The small sample size (N=8) restricts the generalizability of the findings. The short duration of the intervention and the absence of a control group also limit conclusions regarding long-term behavioural changes. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, extended intervention periods, and longitudinal designs to validate the effectiveness of the technique further.

Despite these limitations, expressive writing in group counselling has proven effective in reducing insecure behaviour among fatherless students. Through a structured writing process and peer support within the group, school counsellors can incorporate this technique into guidance services, particularly for students who find it difficult to express themselves verbally. It offers them a safe outlet to articulate their deeper emotions, ultimately fostering healthier self-acceptance without comparing themselves to others.

### **Implications**

This study supports the integration of group counselling with expressive writing techniques into school guidance and counselling programs as a practical, cost-effective, and impactful strategy for addressing emotional issues in fatherless students. Guidance counsellors and educators are encouraged to adopt this method as an alternative medium to help students manage emotions, reduce social anxiety, and build a more positive self-image.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of embedding emotional literacy and self-regulation strategies into counselling curricula. Collaboration between

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school counsellors, homeroom teachers, and parents is essential to ensure sustained psychosocial support for students within school settings and at home.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the effectiveness of expressive writing techniques in group counselling as a strategic intervention to reduce insecure behaviour among fatherless students. By engaging in structured writing sessions focused on emotional expression, self-reflection, and cognitive reframing, students developed greater self-awareness and emotional resilience. The intervention empowered them to view themselves more positively and reduced tendencies toward self-comparison and self-blame.

The findings offer important implications for guidance and counselling practices, particularly in supporting students experiencing emotional distress due to the absence of a father figure. This technique is especially beneficial for those who struggle with verbal expression, offering an alternative medium to process emotions and build psychological strength.

However, this study was limited by its small sample size and the absence of a control group, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is encouraged to explore the long-term effects of expressive writing interventions, replicate the study across diverse populations, and assess the feasibility of implementing this technique in online or virtual counselling settings. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for creative and reflective approaches in school counselling, and it opens avenues for broader applications of expressive writing in addressing various student mental health challenges.

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