

# Expressive Art Therapy for Survivors of Sexual Violence

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**Abstract:** Women survivors of sexual violence experience several psychological problems, such as anxiety, suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, sexual problems, and depression. The most typical problem that occurs in most survivors of sexual violence is low self-esteem. Expressive art therapy is a therapy that can be used to improve individual self-esteem. This study aims to see the effectiveness of expressive art therapy in increasing the self-esteem of women survivors of sexual violence. This type of research is an experiment with a single subject research design. The subjects used were three women survivors of sexual violence. The measuring instrument used to evaluate is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale with 10 items that measures self-esteem globally. Data analysis used visual analysis, inferential analysis, and effectiveness test. The results showed that expressive art therapy was effective in increasing the self-esteem of women survivors of sexual violence. There is an increase in scores in the intervention phase as well as an increasing trend line trend in the intervention phase. The level of change in the intervention phase is higher than the baseline phase where the score is plus (+) which indicates an increase in the subject's self-esteem score.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence is one of the cases which still occurs in our community to this day (CNN Indonesia, 2020). From the data available, it is stated that the highest type of violence which occurs to women is sexual violence (Komnas Perempuan, 2020). Sexual violence is defined as any type of act that includes forced sexual act such as coercion, intimidation to the point where there is physical strength involved to carry out the act (World Health Organization, 2012). Sexual violence which occurs to women eventually causes various problems in several aspects of their lives. The most typical condition found in the survivors of sexual violence is low self-esteem (Morrill, 2014). The prolonged effects of trauma from sexual violence cause the survivors to regard badly of themselves to the point of their self-esteem

decreases (Celbis, Altin, Ayaz, Brk & Karatoprak, 2019). The research conducted in Korea shows that the survivors of sexual violence have a drastic decrease in their self-esteem (Kim, Park, & Park, 2017). The result of this research concluded that the survivors of sexual violence should receive psychological treatment and receive interventions to increase their self-esteem (Kim, Park, & Park, 2017).

Several researchers mentioned that there are interventions which are considered effective in dealing with traumatic cases such as sexual violence, namely cognitive behavior therapy, play therapy, art therapy, and psychodynamic therapy (Westrhenen, Fritz, Vermeer, Boelen, & Kleber, 2019). However, several interventions raise obstacles such as language barriers, which result difficulties for the therapist to carry out the evaluation process,

therefore an assistance is needed by using art media to collect richer data, to reduce language barriers and to make it easier for clients to express their feelings (Rowe, et al., 2017).

The practice of art therapy in handling cases of sexual violence reports that victims of sexual violence who were previously unable to express their emotions slowly begin to find their inner voice and are able to speak freely through their art about what happened to them in the past (Sweig & Park, 2000). Providing art therapy to the sexual violence victims also shows an increase in the aspect of their self-esteem, as the result they are able to carry out their daily activities better (Brooke, 1995).

Art therapy can be practiced in various approaches, one of which is multimodal or also known as Expressive Art Therapy. Malchiodi (2003) explains that several practitioners determine an art therapy will be more effective if it is done in an integrative manner, therefore expressive art therapy can be an option as a therapy. Expressive art therapy is an integrative multimodal approach which utilizes various methods in the therapy process in order to help an individual achieve their personal growth (Malchiodi, 2005). Several types of expressive art therapy which are often used include drawing, playing music, dancing/movement, writing, poetry writing, clay crafting, and theatrical drama in order to express their feelings and thoughts (Drozdek & Bolwerk, 2010; Schouten, Niet, Knipscheer, Kleber & Hutschemaekers, 2015). Expressive art therapy also allows them to explore their thoughts, feelings and identity without any pressure to do so verbally, especially to the victims of sexual harassment who usually struggled in verbalizing their thoughts and feelings (Skeffington & Browne, 2014).

From the existing literatures, expressive art therapy is proven to be effective for working on trauma cases such as sexual violence, and in the process it also can help victims to build up their self-esteem. However, the empirical studies regarding this technique are still very scarce, and as a result experimental studies are still needed regarding the use of expressive art therapy (Perryman, Blisard, & Moss, 2019). It is important to re-examine this technique because it can contribute to the study of the practice of expressive art therapy, especially in increasing the self-esteem in the survivors of sexual violence. Clarke (1978) explains that increasing self-esteem is a very important conduct because when a person feels good about themselves, they will be more effective and productive, and can respond to others in a more appropriate, healthy, and positive way. Hence, this research is conducted in order to

find out whether the expressive art therapy is effective in increasing the self-esteem of women who are survivors of sexual violence.

## 2 METHODS

This study used a single-subject experiment. In this experiment with a single subject, comparisons will be made on the same subject under different conditions, where the conditions referred to are baseline (conditions before treatment/intervention) and experimental or intervention conditions. AB design is used in this single subject experiment, where the AB design is the basic design in a single subject experiment. A (baseline phase) is the pre-treatment phase or the phase when the intervention has not been given to the subject. B (intervention phase) is the treatment or intervention given to the subject (Sunanto, Takeuchi, & Nakata 2005). Data collection was performed by interviews, observation, and the self-esteem measured using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

Participants were chosen based on the following criteria: 1) they had experienced sexual violence, 2) they were between the ages of 18 and 25, 3) they had a negative view of themselves, 4) they had low self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and 5) they were not currently receiving psychological treatment from another professional.

The intervention technique is carried out in a combinatorial manner, which means that more than one mode, namely drawing and writing modes is used. This intervention refers to the creative axis model of Goren-Bar, where Goren-Bar offers 6 stages in providing therapy. Stage 1 is the contact stage, where the subject makes contact with art forms such as trying all available art materials; stage 2 is the organizational stage, where the subject begins to arrange various elements such as choosing and preparing materials to make pictures, playing notes or scales on musical instruments, etc; stage 3 is the improvisation stage, where the subject begins to explore the material and character of art; stage 4 is the central theme, where a theme becomes clear and the subject pays more attention and effort to this aspect of the work of art; stage 5 is the elaboration stage, where the subject modifies, develops, or repairs works of art; stage 6 is the preservation stage, where it is the final stage of the art experience that allows the subject to keep the artwork, distance the artwork or even display the artwork (Malchiodi, 2003). The intervention module had been assessed

beforehand and received critical suggestions from 3 professional judgments.

In this study, baseline measurements were taken three times, and intervention phase measurements were taken eight times. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which was the visual analysis method because research with a single subject experiment is more focused on individual data than group data (Sunanto, Takeuchi, & Nakata 2005).

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Results of Subject 1 Condition Analysis

Chart 1: Baseline phase of subject 1

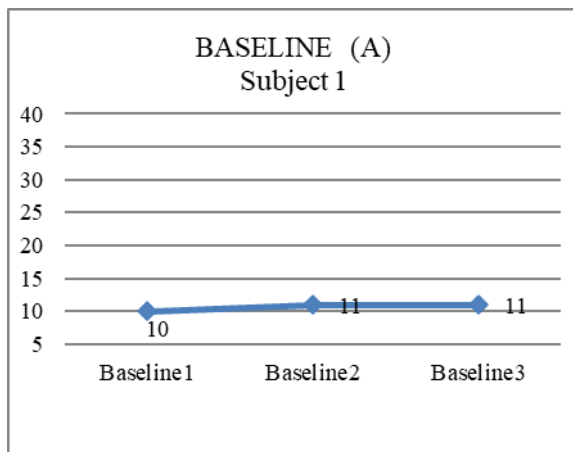
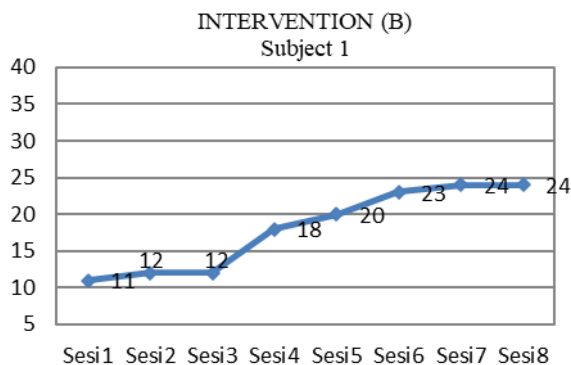


Chart 2: Intervention phase of subject 1



The data results show that the subject's self-esteem has increased. Even though the subject's scores remained in the low category in sessions 1, 2, and 3, there was a gradual increase from session 4 onward. Subjects had a percentage score of 27.5% (score: 11) at the start of the session, which increased to 60%

(score: 24) by the end of the session.

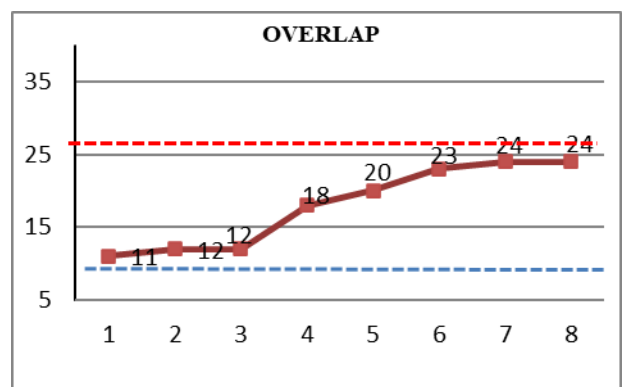
Table 1: Analysis under conditions of subject 1

Result	Baseline	Intervention
Condition length	3	8
Estimated trend direction	— (+)	— (+)
Stability tendency	100% (stable)	12.5% (unstable)
Stability level and range	10 – 11 (stable)	11 – 24 (unstable)
Level change	11 – 10 (+1)	24 – 11 (+13)

The analysis table in conditions shows that the subject's self-esteem score increases during the intervention phases. The subject's score tends to be relatively stable in the baseline phase, with a level change score of +1. During the intervention phase, the subject has a tendency to rise to an unstable level.

The unstable data in this case is caused by an increase in the subject's score in each session, which means that not all of the data is in the stability range. Despite the fact that the intervention phase was relatively unstable, the subject had a score of +13 at the change in level, indicating that there was a greater increase in the subject's self-esteem.

Chart 3 : Data overlap of subject 1



According to the chart, there is one data point in the intervention conditions that is within the range of baseline conditions. The presence of a 12.5% overlap indicates that the intervention only had an

87.5% effect on the subject's self-esteem.

### 3.2 Results of Subject 2 Condition Analysis

Chart 4 : Baseline phase of subject 2

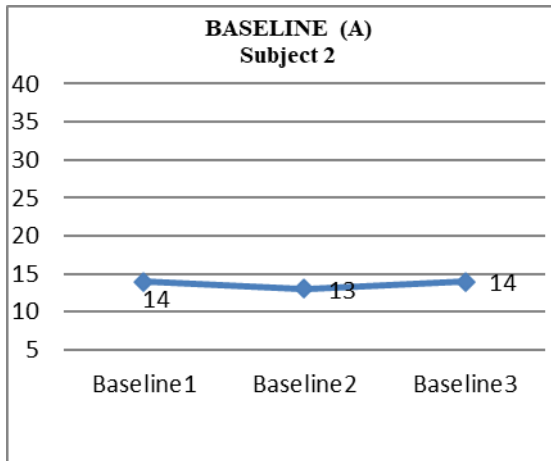
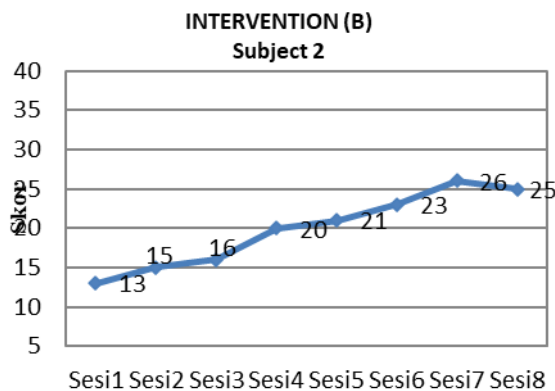


Chart 5 : Intervention phase of subject 2



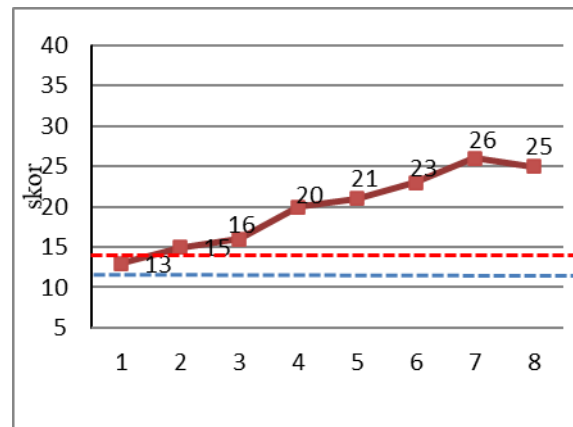
The data show that the subject's self-esteem score increased in each session, but decreased at the end of the session. The subject improved his score in session 2, where he received a 15 with a percentage of 37.5%. However, a significant increase was observed beginning with session 4 and continuing through sessions 5, 6, and 7. There was a decrease in score in session 8, where he had a score of 26 in the previous session and it dropped to 25 in session 8. Overall, subjects had a percentage score of 32.5% (score: 13) at the beginning of the session, which increased to 62.5% (score: 25) at the end.

Table 2 : Analysis under conditions of subject 2

Result	Baseline	Intervensi
Condition length	3	8
Estimated trend direction	— (=)	↗ (+)
Stability tendency	100% (stable)	25% (unstable)
Stability level and range	14 – 14 (stable)	13 – 25 (unstable)
Level change	14 – 14 (=0)	25 – 13 (+12)

According to the analysis table in conditions, the subject's self-esteem score had a tendency for stable data in the baseline phase. The increase in scores that differ in each intervention session, indicates unstable data in this intervention phase. Despite the fact that the data is unstable, the level of change shows a score of +12, indicating that the change is quite good. The level change score in the intervention phase appears to be quite high, implying that the subject's self-esteem increased during the intervention phase.

Chart 6 : Data overlap of subject 2



According to the chart, there is one data point in the intervention conditions that is within the range of baseline conditions. The presence of a 12.5% overlap indicates that the intervention only has an 87.5% effect on subject's self-esteem.

### 3.3 Results of Subject 3 Condition Analysis

Chart 7: Baseline phase of subject 3

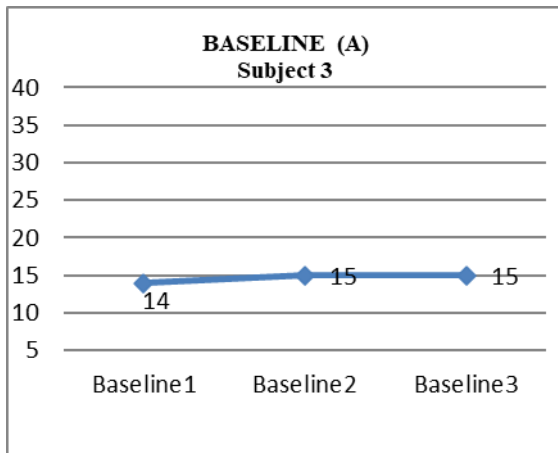
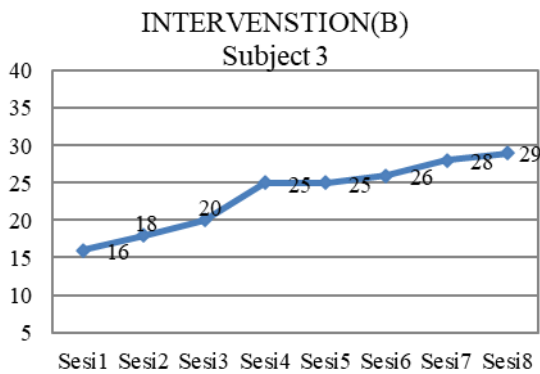


Chart 8: Intervention phase of subject 3



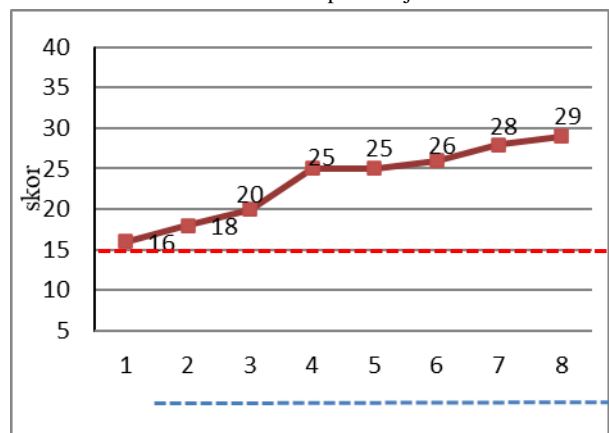
The data results show that the subject's self-esteem has increased. Subjects had a 40% percentage score (score: 16) at the start of the session, which increased to 72.5% (score: 29) at the end.

Table 3: Analysis under conditions of subject 3

Result	Baseline	Intervensi
Condition length	3	8
Estimated trend direction	$\text{—} (+)$	$\text{—} (+)$
Stability tendency	100% (stabil)	25% (tidak stabil)
Stability level and range	14 – 15 (stabil)	16 – 29 (tidak stabil)
Level change	15 – 14 (+1)	29 – 16 (+13)

According to the analysis table in the conditions, the subject's self-esteem score has a tendency to increase in the baseline phase, with a subject level change score of +1. This indicates that the subject's self-esteem increased during the baseline measurement. During the intervention phase, the subject has a tendency to rise to an unstable level. Because the subject data in each session changes and grows, not all data is found in the stability range. The change in the subject level has a score of +13, indicating that there has been an increase and that the changes in the intervention session are classified as good.

Chart 9: Data overlap of subject 3



The chart shows that no data points in the intervention conditions are within the range of baseline conditions. The 0% overlap data indicates that the intervention has a 100% effect on subject's self-esteem.

## 4 DISCUSSION

Based on the results, it appears that expressive art therapy interventions are effective in increasing the self-esteem of the women survivors of sexual violence. In the intervention phase, the three subjects showed a trendline which led to an increase. The level of change in the intervention phase is higher than before the intervention was given, with scores ranging from (+12) to (+13), where this data indicates an improved condition or an increase in self-esteem scores in the intervention phase. From the available overlapping data, the three subjects show that this intervention gave an impact for their self-esteem increasing. The comparison of the mean levels in each subject shows that the research subjects' self-esteem have increased after the

intervention was given. The results of the effectiveness test also show that, overall, expressive art therapy has moderate effectiveness for increasing self-esteem in women survivors of sexual violence. Thus, it can be said that expressive art therapy is effective in increasing the self-esteem in women survivors of sexual violence.

The result in this research is in accordance with the research conducted by Vaartio-Rajalin, et al., (2021) using the scoping review method, it shows that the expressive arts therapy can increase self-esteem, self-expression, self-efficacy, and living quality of an individual. A study conducted by Ching-Teng, Ya-Ping, & Yu-Chia (2019) showed that this art therapy is able to increase self-esteem in adults as well. In the mentioned research, it is explained that through self-exploration and meaningful interpersonal interaction, it can increase their self-confidence and happiness with the result that their self-esteem is able to increase slowly. From a study conducted by Reynolds, Nabors, & Quinlan (2000) using the literature review method found that art therapy has a positive effect when it is used to provide interventions for them. From this study, there were three studies reviewed which are related to the effect of art therapy on one's self-esteem, where the results obtained were that there was an increase or positive change in the subject's self-esteem after being given an intervention in the form of art therapy.

To increase a person's self-esteem generally requires a long-term process and there are several factors which shaped and developed their self-esteem (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). Emler (2001) also explains that to increase a person's self-esteem or self-assessment cannot be done in a short-term because each individual will be in a process through it from time to time. From the result of this research, it can be seen that research subjects need time to process and develop themselves in order that their self-esteem can also increase. The three subjects began to show a higher increase in their self-esteem scores in session IV of the intervention, whereas in sessions I – III the subject's score did not show a high increase and even tended to be the same as in the baseline phase or before the intervention.

The increase in self-esteem of each research subject shows that the occurring increase from the subjects varies in each session, as the result the tendency for data stability in the intervention phase seemed unstable. Deci & Ryan (1995, in Abdel-Khalek, 2016) explains that the self-esteem of each individual can be unstable as it is influenced by events, situations, and emotions they experienced.

The perspective of each person is also subjective, hence it is very possible that their views regarding themselves will change according to the situation at that time. Emler (2001) explains that individual self-esteem also depends on their self-perception or self-image, therefore the impact of one intervention can vary for each research subject and becomes unstable over time due to each individual having their own unique way in regarding their undergoing circumstances.

In this research, the practice of expressive art therapy is considered to be able to facilitate the subjects expressing their emotions safely, followed by joint discussions in order that the subjects could reinterpret their own experiences, to begin forming new expectations and to increase their self-esteem slowly. Expressive art therapy is also said to be a safe place to gain an opportunity to reduce negative emotions within themselves. It also brings out the real expressions of their cognitions, emotions, beliefs and experiences in order that the creation of art can increase self-esteem, self-confidence, and emotional skills in each individual (Tripathi & Dilawari, 2012). This can also be seen from the results of this research, where after expressing their emotions and thoughts in session I to session III, self-esteem scores began to increase slowly from session IV to the final session.

The practice of drawing therapy in expressive art therapy also helps research subjects to express themselves more freely and they are able to reinterpret the events they experienced in order to increase their self-esteem. While drawing, someone can express and release all their emotions, as the result it can help them reduce stress while increasing their self-esteem (Buchalter, 2015). On the other hand, applying expressive writing therapy also has an important role in the process of increasing the self-esteem of the research subject. Seight et al. (2011 in Costa & Abreu, 2018) explains that expressive writing is able to evoke more emotions, therefore this technique can be used to escape emotional experiences, especially unpleasant experiences.

## 5 LIMITATIONS

The types of cases in this study were not controlled, with different types of sexual violence cases in each subject. Of course, different types of cases will have different effects on differences in self-esteem in research subjects, such as sexual violence perpetrated by family members versus sexual

violence perpetrated by strangers. During the research activity, the researchers also failed to observe and investigate each subject's moral and personality development, despite the fact that moral and personality development is an important factor that affects the self-esteem of research subjects. If there is information about these two topics, it will help explain the differences in self-esteem in each subject in greater detail.

Art tools and materials, as well as space for performing art therapy, were scarce in this study. If art tools and materials such as canvas, watercolor, oil paint, brushes, and drawing paper of various sizes are included, research subjects may be able to express themselves more freely. The subject's choice of art tools and materials may be influenced by the subject's limited space or location for performing art therapy, where the subject may choose the safest tools and materials so as not to contaminate the existing facilities.

The limited research or studies that discuss expressive art therapy in increasing self-esteem, especially for survivors of sexual violence, makes researchers unable to compare more specifically the results of this study with previous studies. Lee (2019) explains in his writing that research on expressive art therapy is still very limited, and that while expressive art therapy can be said to be effective in having a positive impact on individuals, more recent research on this therapy is needed.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Expressive art therapy effectively increases self-esteem in women survivors of sexual violence. This can be seen from the increased data tendency in the comparison of the intervention phase and the baseline phase (before the intervention). Moreover, the advantage of using expressive art therapy in this research is that it can bring up new and more positive meanings to the research subjects. The idea regarding the subject's powerlessness after surviving sexual violence can be reinterpreted differently by the subject and can also bring out self-acceptance towards themselves, therefore the three subjects in this research are ultimately able to make changes for themselves such as finding life goals, being more assertive, focusing on themselves and their goals, and able to be more open towards the opposite gender.

The weakness of expressive art therapy, on the other hand, is that it takes a long time to complete the activity. Time cannot be limited when creating

art because the creativity of each subject will appear differently, which will take a long time. This will also have an impact on the researcher's condition, as the researcher must be able to devote full attention to the subject for an extended period of time.

## 7 SUGGESTION

Future researchers may want to look into group therapy. Given that peer support and validation can boost self-esteem, group therapy may be a place for subjects to provide mutual support to one another. The subject's interest in the art activities to be carried out must be considered when selecting research subjects. The presence of interest in artistic activities will strengthen the subject's consistency and attention to therapy activities, allowing therapy to provide the greatest benefit to research subjects. The use of expressive art therapy to increase self-esteem can be done in different populations to learn more about the effectiveness of expressive art therapy for self-esteem.

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