



# Psychosynthesis using Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) to reduce Depression and Anxiety: Case Report on a group of Emerging Adults

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## Abstract

Depression and anxiety are strong indicators of difficulties in the process of recentering during emerging adulthood. Although various interventions exist to address these issues, group psychosynthesis offers efficient treatment in developing countries. This study employed a convergent mixed methods design to examine the effectiveness of Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) in reducing depression and anxiety among seven university students who exhibited tendencies of self-harm and voluntarily agreed to participate in therapy. Results showed a significant reduction ( $t(6) = 4.73; p < .01$ ) in depression and anxiety, as measured by the Patient Health Questionnaire Anxiety and Depression (PHQ-ADS) scale before therapy ( $M = 34.1; SD = 7.29$ ) and after therapy ( $M = 20.6; SD = 10.8$ ). The application of psychosynthesis through the Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) module in a group setting demonstrates potential as a cost-effective option for primary healthcare professionals, particularly in addressing the rising number of students at risk of self-harm or suicide.

**Keywords:** anxiety; case report; depression; emerging adulthood; psychosynthesis

Self-harm and suicide tendencies have become significant mental health concerns, particularly among university students in Indonesia. Surveys indicate that Indonesians in this age group are two and a half times more likely to engage in self-harming behaviors compared to adults (Liem et al., 2022). The transition to online learning during the pandemic exacerbated their vulnerability, with studies showing that 50.4% of young adults reported self-harm and suicidal ideation after the pandemic. Recent media reports highlight the rising number of student suicides, making this issue a national concern (Jumbadi, 2024). This phenomenon contrasts sharply with the key characteristics of Millennials and Generation Z, who are in a phase filled with opportunities to explore various possibilities through technological and industrial advancements (Arnett, 2023). Notably, high-risk behaviors prevalent among young adults, particularly university students, make them the most represented group in suicide cases in Indonesia (Arafat et al., 2024; Onie et al., 2024). Depression with comorbid anxiety is a primary predictor of self-harm and suicide attempts (Li et al., 2022). In Indonesia, the high prevalence of depression among young adults calls for urgent intervention to address contributing factors such as childhood trauma, socioeconomic changes, stigma, discrimination, and perceptions of health (Purborini et al., 2021). Although multiple psychotherapeutic approaches exist—including behavioral activation therapy, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy, problem-solving interventions, and psychodynamic therapy—these methods typically require multiple individual sessions and active therapist involvement (Thapar

et al., 2022). This presents a challenge in Indonesia, where the ratio of mental health professionals is 1:60,000, emphasizing the need for scalable interventions (Onie et al., 2024). Addressing self-harm and suicide tendencies requires interventions that help individuals regulate emotions, reframe negative experiences, and develop resilience. Psychosynthesis offers a structured approach by integrating multiple levels of consciousness, guiding individuals to detach from distressing identities, and fostering self-awareness (Audate, 2022). This method works through self-disidentification, enabling individuals to break free from destructive thought patterns and connect with a more adaptive sense of self, reducing their vulnerability to suicidal ideation (Gale, 2024). Combined with group interventions focused on growth mindset, as discussed by Thapar et al. (2022), this approach offers a potential effectiveness of low-cost intervention for developing countries. Previous research by Böge et al. (2020) demonstrated that psychosynthesis effectively reduces depressive symptoms in all 58 adults aged 18–81. The study highlighted that participants' mindfulness significantly benefits the therapeutic process. Additionally, a case study presented by Audate (2022) emphasized self-disidentification as a crucial element for the success of psychosynthesis, enabling individuals to detach from roles, attitudes, subpersonalities, and self-limitations to connect with their higher self. In Indonesia, psychosynthesis has been applied to reduce depression in five women aged 33–59 who were victims of domestic violence (Saragih & Yuniarti, 2021), and in five schizophrenia caregivers aged 31–42 (Zulaehah & Urbayatun, 2020). Both studies highlight disidentification as



a method for participants to achieve mindfulness about their negative experiences and feelings, addressing the depression. However, disidentification is only the beginning of a series of concepts proposed by Roberto Assagioli in psychosynthesis. Other sequential concepts include: The Personal Self; The Will (good, strong, and skillful); The Ideal Model; Synthesis; The Superconscious; and The Transpersonal Self (Firman & Gila, 2007). Psychosynthesis is inclusive and flexible in its techniques and methods, making these seven core concepts fundamental. For example, Saragih and Yuniarti (2021) illustrate how these core concepts sequentially assist individuals with depression by helping them understand and accept traumatic life experiences, identify their potential, liberate perceptions, build self-development, and focus on future life goals. Group approaches are more beneficial than individual ones due to peer support, creating a comfortable, safe, and empathetic environment that fosters recovery and tolerance in high-pressure situations (Corey et al., 2014; Zulaehah & Urbayatun, 2020). Psychosynthesis has been promoted by Roberto Assagioli since 1974, yet there is limited empirical data on its effectiveness due to its flexible nature, especially in the context of young adults. Only two studies on psychosynthesis from Indonesia have involved 3 participants aged 19-30 years (Widiasari, 2020) and 3 victims of dating violence aged 21-23 years (Hasanah et al., 2020). Outside Indonesia, only Audate (2022) and Böge et al. (2020) have recently used psychosynthesis in the United States and Germany, respectively, though neither specifically targeted young adults. Therefore, this report aims to examine the mental health issues emerging in young adulthood and the effectiveness of psychosynthesis in reducing depression with comorbid anxiety during emerging adulthood, as proposed by Thapar et al. (2022) in a therapy group composed of higher education students. This report employs the Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) module by Rosada et al. (2021) consisting of 8 sessions based on Roberto Assagioli's seven core concepts of psychosynthesis, which have been validated by previous studies in Indonesia. The use of the ELT module as the main variable for applying psychosynthesis also ensures consistency in assessing the effectiveness of psychosynthesis in future research and its practical implementation in primary healthcare.

## 1. Methods

### 1.1 Design

This case report utilizes a convergent mixed methods design where researchers collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, then merging the results to provide a more comprehensive discussion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussion before the intervention, while quantitative data were gathered before and after the intervention. Independent variable of this report is the use of Empathic Love Therapy (ELT), which is a module of the psychosynthesis approach. Dependent variable of this report are depression and anxiety levels, as measured by the PHQ-ADS scale.

### 1.2 Instruments

Quantitative data were measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire Anxiety and Depression Scale (PHQ-ADS), which combines the PHQ-9 for depression and the GAD-7 for anxiety, reflecting the comorbidity of depression and anxiety (Adams et al., 2016; Washburn et al., 2016). The PHQ-ADS defines cut-off scores of 10 for mild, 20 for moderate, and 30 for severe symptoms (Kroenke et al., 2016). The qualitative instrument used was a focus group discussion (FGD), consisting of open and unstructured questions designed to elicit participants' opinions and views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The FGD employed pretherapy change, questioning, and summary feedback techniques to foster therapeutic relationships, help participants identify internal resources, and facilitate constructive changes for the future (Corey et al., 2014). The intervention employed a psychosynthesis using the Indonesian-language Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) module, which has been validated and utilized in prior studies (Hasanah et al., 2020; Saragih & Yuniarti, 2021; Widiasari, 2020; Zulaehah & Urbayatun, 2020). Comprising eight group sessions after FGD (Table 2), the ELT module operationalizes the seven core concepts of Roberto Assagioli's psychosynthesis: Disidentification; The personal self; The will (good, strong, and skillful); The ideal model; Synthesis; The superconscious; and The transpersonal Self (Firman & Gila, 2007).

### 1.3 Participants

Participants in this report were patients from the psychology clinic at Puskesmas Gondokusuman 1 Yogyakarta, who had PHQ-ADS scores above the cut-off and were aged 17-30 years. Eligible patients were voluntarily invited to join the therapy group. A total of 8 participants signed informed consent; however, 1 participant was unable to complete the intervention due to work commitments. Seven participants (Table 1), all of whom were active university students, completed the intervention sessions, although 1 participant did not attend all sessions. PHQ-ADS indicated that 6 out of 7 participants experienced feelings of being better off dead or self-harming.

### 1.4 Procedures

Participants were gathered in a WhatsApp group chat to facilitate scheduling meetings. The first meeting began with introductions, informed consent procedures, and an explanation of the intervention process. This was followed by a focus group discussion on the issues faced by participants. A person-centered approach was used to help each group member identify personal problems or limitations and to create a comfortable and accepting group atmosphere. This approach guided the group with simple, empathetic, and respectful language, making it a supportive environment for self-expression (Corey et al., 2014).

The intervention process, outlined in Table 2, consisted of several sessions from module by Rosada et al. (2021). After the intervention, the researcher sent a link to google forms of PHQ-ADS to the group chat for the 7 participants who completed the intervention to fill out. The entire research procedure took place over 5 consecutive days at the Puskesmas Gondokusuman 1 Yogyakarta Hall. The

**Table 1**  
Participant Description

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	PHQ-ADS Pre-test ( $M = 34.1$ ; $SD = 7.29$ )	PHQ-ADS Post-test ( $M = 20.6$ ; $SD = 10.8$ )
1	Hana	Female	20	28 (moderate)	16 (mild)
2	Nurmi	Female	19	33 (severe)	9 (normal)
3	Timi	Female	23	39 (severe)	20 (moderate)
4	Gana	Female	20	22 (moderate)	7 (normal)
5	Eli	Female	20	41 (severe)	35 (severe)
6	Ali	Male	21	34 (severe)	32 (severe)
7	Tomi	Male	23	42 (severe)	25 (moderate)

**Table 2**  
Procedure Sequence

No.	Session	Description
1	Focus Group Discussion	Exploring the issues that led participants to seek mental help to primary health care.
2	Preparation, Opening, and Introduction	Understanding the therapy process and practicing simple relaxation and visualization techniques.
3	Self-Exploration	Getting acquainted with the patterns and attitudes of the different aspects of oneself in various situations.
4	Exploring Wounds	Recognizing emotional wounds (primal wounding) and the roles that emerge as a result.
5	Subpersonalities Interactions	Managing interactions and conflicts among the subpersonalities that disrupt quality of life and happiness.
6	Self-Love	Reviewing the entirety of life experiences and aspects of the self, beyond a single subpersonality.
7	Will	Reconstructing the will to discover and accept distorted or hidden qualities of the self.
8	Aspirations and Action Plan	Developing the highest aspiration and setting an action plan through personal transformation.
9	Love, Gratitude, and Closure	Loving oneself and expressing gratitude to God through visualization. The conclusion reviews the entire therapeutic process.

research procedures were supervised by the Puskesmas Gondokusuman 1 Yogyakarta clinic's psychologist.

## 2. Result

Qualitative data analysis was conducted by preparing and managing data for reading, coding to assign themes, and providing descriptions of the qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Four themes emerged related to the participants' issues: **Loneliness and Negative Thoughts While Alone**. Participants struggled with socializing and chose to isolate themselves. All participants were students from outside the city living in boarding houses without direct family support. Some believed that their families could not provide support. The situation worsened as negative thoughts became dominant when alone, including feelings of disappointment, guilt, low self-worth, and suicidal ideation, as well as self-harming behaviors.

**Difficulty Letting Go of Sadness**. Participants recognized that their issues were not easy to address and had sought help to avoid feeling overwhelmed. However, they often struggled to release negative thoughts and feelings, leading to silence or crying. The lack of family or close friends made it challenging to move past sadness and negative thoughts.

**Disrupted Productivity**. Participants reported that when experiencing loneliness and difficulty in letting go of sadness, they tended to procrastinate on academic tasks and abandon their usual routines. Some participants were in their fifth semester with a demanding class schedule. Others who were active in student organizations also com-

plained that their issues prevented them from fulfilling their obligations within these organizations.

**Lack of Motivation and Clear Life Goals**. Some participants mentioned that they were merely following their parents' wishes and pride in attending a prestigious university without knowing their future life goals. On the other hand, a participant continued living only to escape from their parents and prove he could attend university independently, even though they longed to return home because they missed their mother. All participants agreed that the loss of motivation and clear life goals made it difficult for them to resolve their problems.

**The effectiveness of the intervention** was assessed by comparing pre- and post-intervention PHQ-ADS scores using a paired sample *t*-test, as the score differences between the two time points were normally distributed (Field, 2018). Due to the small sample size of the intervention group, which increases the risk of Type I error in a student's *t*-test, a within-pair correlation test using Pearson correlation was also conducted to examine the correlation between the two sets of quantitative data. A higher correlation coefficient indicates better statistical power (De Winter, 2019). The analysis (Table 3) revealed that psychosynthesis using ELT significantly reduced depression and anxiety with a large effect size ( $d = 1.79$ ;  $p < .05$ ) accompanied by a high within-pair correlation ( $r = .711$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

Individual observations of each participant (Table 1) showed that most experienced a substantial reduction in their scores. Six out of eight participants reached their

**Table 3**  
Pre-Post PHQ-ADS Analysis

Statistic	Value (p-value)	Interpretation
Student's <i>t</i> -test	4.73 (0.003)	Statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ).
Shapiro-Wilk	0.974 (0.928)	Data is normally distributed ( $p > 0.05$ ).
Pearson's <i>r</i>	0.711 (0.037)	Moderate positive correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ).
Cohen's <i>d</i>	1.79	Large effect size, substantial difference.

Note: The results are as follows:

- The **\*\*Student's *t*-test\*\*** suggests a significant difference between the groups being compared.
- The **\*\*Shapiro-Wilk\*\*** test indicates the data follows a normal distribution.
- The **\*\*Pearson's *r*\*\*** suggests a moderate positive correlation between the two variables, which is statistically significant.
- The **\*\*Cohen's *d*\*\*** value suggests a large effect size, indicating a substantial difference between the groups.

highest aspirations and expressed an ability to practice self-love and gratitude toward God. However, Ali and Eli remained mostly silent throughout the sessions and appeared more anxious than the others. During the intervention, they were observed frequently fidgeting with their hands or tapping their feet, which was noticeable to the other participants. Although they were able to follow the process up to the interaction of inner players, they struggled to identify their highest aspirations or life goals.

### 3. Discussion

Psychosynthesis in the form of ELT has been shown to be highly effective ( $d = 1.79$ ;  $p < .01$ ) to reduce depressive and anxiety symptoms among young adults, particularly university students. The intervention fosters self-acceptance of wounded Self and the development of higher aspirations, accompanied by peer support from the group intervention, making psychosynthesis a promising solution for addressing the depressive symptoms (Böge et al., 2020; Saragih & Yuniarti, 2021). The effectiveness can be attributed to its psychosynthesis-based approach, which integrates self-acceptance, emotional processing, and higher aspiration development. Psychosynthesis helps individuals disengage from negative sub-personalities and reintegrate a more empowered and whole sense of Self (Firman & Gila, 2007). The process of disidentification allows individuals to detach from distressing identities and recognize their inner strength, which is crucial in overcoming depressive symptoms (Audate, 2022; Böge et al., 2020; Widiarsari, 2020). Group setting fosters peer support, further enhancing motivation and resilience, as peer connection has been shown to be a protective factor against depression. Previous studies have also demonstrated that group-based psychosynthesis interventions can significantly improve psychological well-being, particularly in populations facing existential distress (Hasanah et al., 2020; Rosada, 2019). Four key themes reflecting participants' struggles before the intervention: Loneliness and Negative Thoughts While Alone; Difficulty Letting Go of Sadness; Disrupted Productivity; and Lack of Motivation or Clear Life Goals. Many participants experienced social isolation due to being far from family support, leading to negative thought patterns, self-harming behaviors, and suicidal ideation (Tanner, 2007). Others reported difficulty overcoming sadness, which led to academic procrastination and withdrawal from student activities. These experiences explained by Arnett (2023) and supported by

structural equation modeling by Galanaki et al. (2023) as characteristic of emerging adults. The intervention helped participants address these issues by fostering emotional processing, self-acceptance, and clarity in life aspirations. ELT also fosters peer support in a group setting, which has been identified as a protective factor against depression (Corey et al., 2014; Thapar et al., 2022). Through psychosynthesis, individuals disengaged from negative sub-personalities and reintegrated a more empowered and whole sense of Self (Firman & Gila, 2007; Rueffler, 1995). The group setting provided emotional validation and motivation, reinforcing that participants were not alone in their struggles, which contributed to overall emotional relief (Corey et al., 2014; Zulaehah & Urbayatun, 2020). The intervention helped participants overcome difficulty in letting go of sadness by facilitating emotional processing and self-acceptance (Saragih & Yuniarti, 2021). Prior to the intervention, many participants struggled with prolonged sadness, leading to academic procrastination and withdrawal from student activities (Nelson, 2020). ELT employs the process of disidentification, allowing individuals to detach from distressing sub-personalities and recognize their inner strength (Böge et al., 2020). This aligns with the findings of Rosada (2019) and Widiarsari (2020) who demonstrated that ELT significantly improve psychological well-being. The intervention helped participants acknowledge and process their internal pain rather than suppress it, using inner power to foster emotional resilience (Audate, 2022). In addressing disrupted productivity, ELT played a crucial role in improving participants' ability to manage academic responsibilities and daily tasks. Many participants reported difficulty maintaining productivity due to emotional distress, which often resulted in procrastination and withdrawal (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). Psychosynthesis reconstructs the will, enabling individuals to function with planned productivity (Rosada et al., 2021). The intervention guided participants in recognizing that sub-personalities tied to past failures or negative beliefs were inhibiting their ability to engage productively. By fostering self-awareness and empowering the Self, ELT helped participants regain motivation to engage in academic and extracurricular activities. The intervention was particularly effective in addressing a lack of motivation and unclear life goals, a common issue among emerging adults (Arnett, 2023). Participants who initially struggled with setting and pursuing life goals showed significant improvement after engaging in ELT sessions. The



intervention encouraged them to explore their highest aspirations and formulate life plans, which aligns with the developmental process of recentering (Tanner, 2007). This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that ELT enhances goal-setting abilities and long-term well-being (Widiasari, 2020). However, two participants, Ali and Eli, showed limited progress, remaining mostly silent and displaying signs of anxiety, such as fidgeting and foot-tapping. Observable behavioral cues, such as frequent fidgeting and foot-tapping, suggested discomfort. While they followed the intervention process, they struggled to identify their highest aspirations or life goals. This highlights the need for additional support to ensure full engagement. Despite the promising results, this study has several limitations. The small sample size restricts the generalizability of the findings, necessitating future research with larger randomized controlled trials. Additionally, self-reported measures were used, which may introduce bias; incorporating physiological or behavioral indicators would strengthen validation. Another limitation is the cultural and clinical applicability of ELT, as its effectiveness in diverse populations remains uncertain. Furthermore, the absence of long-term follow-up prevents conclusions on the sustainability of the intervention's benefits. Some participants also faced external stressors that affected their ability to fully commit to reflective exercises, suggesting that additional support mechanisms could enhance engagement. Finally, previous research indicates that Brief ELT sessions have shown limited effectiveness in some situations (Bandoro & Yuniarti, 2018; Iswahyuningtyas & Adiyanti, 2022), emphasizing the importance of structured, full-length interventions. ELT has the potential to be integrated into primary healthcare services to provide group interventions targeting psychological distress among young adults. As an inclusive approach, psychosynthesis aligns with promotive, preventive, and rehabilitative services. Previous studies have demonstrated its applicability in various contexts, including improving subjective well-being among inclusive schoolteachers (Rosada, 2019) and enhancing medication adherence among HIV patients (Putra, 2022; Setiawati, 2024). These adaptations highlight the potential of psychosynthesis-based interventions in addressing broader community mental health concerns.

#### 4. Conclusion

This report demonstrates that psychosynthesis using Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) significantly reduces depression and anxiety in emerging adults, showing a substantial potential for effectiveness. Its application in a group setting offers a scalable and cost-efficient intervention for mental health professionals, especially in resource-limited settings. Additionally, it confirms that issues such as negative thoughts and feelings arising from social difficulties, loss of motivation and life goals, and disrupted productivity drive the search for help among emerging adults.

##### 4.1 Recommendation

Future researchers are expected to measure changes between sessions and long-after to assess long-term effectiveness. Incorporating a control group or alternative

therapies with larger samples could refine the study design into true experiment research to strengthen evidence and refine its application in different healthcare systems. Non-Indonesian researchers can replicate the Empathic Love Therapy (ELT) module to test its effectiveness across cultures.

Psychologists can integrate ELT into community mental health programs, university counselling, and primary care to provide a cost-efficient intervention for depression and anxiety. Training professionals in psychosynthesis and evaluating its impact will help expand its reach, making it a practical option in settings with limited access to individual therapy.

## 5. Declaration

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### 5.2 Authors' Contributions

The first author was responsible for the design of the assessment, conducting the research, and writing the manuscript. The second author provided guidance and input during the assessment process, intervention, and manuscript writing.


### 5.3 Conflict of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest during the writing of the article.

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