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The effect of mindfulness meditation on anxiety among justice-involved adolescents

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Abstract

Anxiety can harm behavior, social functioning, and the rehabilitation process, especially in adolescents in conflict with the law. This study aims to analyze the effect of mindfulness meditation therapy on anxiety levels in adolescents in conflict with the law at the Paramita Mataram Center. The study used a quantitative approach with a one-group pre-test post-test pre-experimental design. All adolescents who met the inclusion criteria were involved as research samples, with a total of 48 respondents through total sampling. Anxiety levels were measured before and after the intervention using a questionnaire. Data analysis used the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test. The results showed a decrease in anxiety levels after mindfulness meditation therapy. The decrease was marked by a shift in the anxiety category from moderate to low or no anxiety. These findings indicate that mindfulness meditation is effective in helping adolescents improve emotional regulation and psychological awareness. This intervention has practical relevance as a promotive and preventive approach in mental health services for adolescents in conflict with the law.

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1. Introduction

Adolescence is a phase of development characterized by rapid and often unstable biological, cognitive, and emotional changes. The emotional dynamics during this period can be constructive when appropriately directed, but they also carry the risk of various psychological problems if not appropriately managed. Positive emotions such as joy, love, and happiness contribute to the formation of adaptive behavior, while negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, fear, and anxiety often trigger adjustment disorders in adolescents. Therefore, understanding adolescent emotional development is an important foundation in efforts to optimize their potential and respond more appropriately to the problems they face (Azmi, 2015).

One of the most common psychological disorders experienced by adolescents is anxiety. Anxiety is understood as a psychological condition characterized by excessive worry, difficulty controlling emotions, and persistent feelings. Individuals experiencing anxiety generally show difficulty concentrating, emotional tension, and an inability to relax, even though the source of the threat is often unclear and comes from within (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2020). The World Health Organization reports that more than 301 million people, or about 3.6% of the world's population, experience anxiety disorders, with a 25% increase in prevalence reported in various countries in recent years (WHO, 2024).

The trend of increasing anxiety in Indonesia also shows an alarming pattern. The Ministry of

Health's Health Research and Development Agency noted that by the end of 2021, there had been a 6.8% increase in anxiety disorders compared to the previous year. Throughout 2020, more than 18,000 individuals experienced anxiety disorders, accompanied by high rates of depression and suicide attempts (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2023). Riskesdas data shows that the national prevalence of anxiety reached 6.1%, or the equivalent of 11 million people, in 2018. The province of West Nusa Tenggara even ranks high in the prevalence of emotional and mental disorders and depression, exceeding the national average (Kemenkes RI, 2024).

Data from the Mutiara Sukma Mental Hospital in West Nusa Tenggara Province reinforce the regional situation. The data shows a high number of patients diagnosed with depression, with most of them being of productive age, including adolescents (Mutiara Sukma Mental Hospital, West Nusa Tenggara Province, 2018). Various studies show that adolescents are vulnerable to a spectrum of mental health problems, ranging from anxiety, depression, emotional disorders, to borderline and abnormal conditions (Jayanti et al., 2022; Jayanti et al., 2023; Jayanti et al., 2024; Azzahro et al., 2021; Nopitawati et al., 2024).

Psychological vulnerability in adolescents increases in complex social situations, including those involving the law. Adolescents involved in legal conflicts often experience intense psychological pressure, characterized by feelings of isolation, fear, confusion, and helplessness in facing legal processes and the accompanying social stigma. The factors underlying adolescent involvement with the law are multidimensional, including maladaptive parenting practices, weak family support, negative peer influences, poor emotional regulation skills, and limited social support (Sulistiowati et al., 2018; Risal et al., 2020; Handayani et al., 2025). Mindfulness meditation in psychological interventions can be a promising approach to help adolescents manage emotional stress and anxiety.

Mindfulness training combined with self-compassion meditation can help individuals cope with unpleasant experiences more openly and with greater acceptance. It can also develop a more balanced understanding of positive experiences (Germer, 2009). This approach is also reinforced by the Sedona Method, which emphasizes the release of painful emotions, where self-awareness plays an important role in reducing symptoms of depression (Bishop, 2008). In addition, mindfulness has been shown to reduce excessive attachment to past experiences and worries about the future, as well as increase focus on the present moment (Desrosiers et al., 2013). Several empirical studies have also reported that mindfulness practices contribute significantly to improved mental health and psychological wellbeing (Gross et al., 2019; Manchia et al., 2020; Nuraini & Lestari, 2021).

The Paramita Mataram Center, as a social welfare institution under the Ministry of Social Affairs, plays a strategic role in providing social rehabilitation, legal protection, and assistance to children in conflict with the law. This institution handles various cases involving children as perpetrators, victims, or witnesses. However, limited community participation and insufficient awareness of available services remain challenges in optimizing child protection. A preliminary survey shows that of the 48 adolescents at Sentra Paramita Mataram, the majority were involved in various legal cases, ranging from theft, sexual intercourse, possession of sharp weapons, to drug abuse (Sentra Paramita Mataram, 2024). Analysis indicates a need to further the anxiety levels of adolescents in conflict with the law and explore intervention approaches that could potentially support their mental health. Therefore, this study focuses on the effect of mindfulness meditation on anxiety levels in adolescents in conflict with the law at Sentra Paramita Mataram. It is done to strengthen the scientific basis for needs-based psychosocial interventions.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Participants

This study used a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental one-group pre-test–post-test design to assess changes in adolescent anxiety levels after being given a mindfulness meditation intervention. Respondents' psychological conditions were measured before and after the intervention within the same group to evaluate the intervention's direct effects. The research population consisted of 48 adolescents in conflict with the law who were undergoing counseling at the Paramita Mataram Center. The sample was the entire population, which was determined through total sampling. It was done because the population was relatively small and all participants met the research criteria (Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

2.2 Instruments and Data Collection

The data in this study were primary, obtained directly from respondents through structured questionnaires. The instrument used was the Hamilton Rating Scale for Anxiety (HRS-A), which has been

widely used in clinical and psychosocial studies to assess anxiety levels based on psychological and somatic aspects. The data collection process was carried out in two stages. The first stage was the measurement of initial anxiety levels (pre-test) conducted before the mindfulness meditation intervention. Next, respondents participated in a series of mindfulness-based therapy sessions, structured and tailored to adolescent characteristics. The re-measurement of anxiety levels (post-test) using the same instrument was conducted after all intervention sessions were completed. The data obtained reflected changes in respondents' anxiety levels before and after the intervention, which were used to assess the effectiveness of mindfulness meditation therapy.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages: univariate and bivariate analyses. Univariate analysis was used to describe respondents' characteristics by case type or legal problem, and to examine the distribution of respondents' anxiety levels during the pre-test and post-test. Bivariate analysis was conducted to test the effect of mindfulness meditation intervention on changes in respondents' anxiety levels. The statistical test used was the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for two paired groups with non-normal data. The entire data processing and analysis process was carried out using SPSS version 25, with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. The analysis results were declared statistically significant if the p-value was < 0.05 (Subhaktiyasa et al., 2025).

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles of health research ethics. All participants were given a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose, the procedures to be followed, the potential risks and benefits, and their rights as research respondents. Written consent (informed consent) was obtained from respondents and from guardians or legally responsible parties. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of identity codes and secure data storage. The mindfulness meditation intervention was designed to be non-invasive, safe, and appropriate for adolescents' developmental stage.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

A total of 48 adolescents in conflict with the law at the Paramita Mataram Center were involved in this study. The characteristics of the respondents are presented based on the type of case or legal problem they experienced, as shown in Table 1. Meanwhile, anxiety levels before and after mindfulness meditation therapy are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on cases/issues

Cases/Issues	Number	Percentage (%)
Theft	16	33
Sexual intercourse	15	31
Drug abuse	3	6
Possession of sharp weapons	10	20
Deviant social behavior	2	4
Abuse	2	4

Table 2. Distribution of anxiety levels before and after mindfulness meditation therapy

Anxiety	Pre-Test		Post-Test		p-value	Z-value
	Total	%	Total	%		
Category	13	27.08	17	35.42	0.001	-3.29
Not anxious	9	18.75	16	33.33		
Mild anxiety	26	54.17	15	31.25		
Moderate anxiety	0	0	0	0		
Severe anxiety	0	0	0	0		

Table 1 shows that theft was the most common crime reported by respondents, accounting for 33% of cases. Sexual intercourse cases ranked second with a percentage of 31.0%, followed by 20% of cases involving

possession of sharp weapons. Drug abuse was experienced by 6% of respondents, while deviant social behavior and abuse were each recorded at 4%. This distribution shows the range of legal problems adolescents experience.

Table 2 shows that 51.17% of respondents had mild anxiety and 18.75% were in the non-anxious category before the intervention. After the mindfulness meditation intervention, the number of respondents in the non-anxious category increased to 33.33%. Meanwhile, the mild anxiety category decreased to 31.25%. No respondents were found to have moderate or severe anxiety either before or after the intervention. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test results showed a Z value of -3.29 and a p-value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$). These results indicate a difference in the anxiety levels of respondents before and after the mindfulness meditation therapy.

3.2 Discussion

Research shows statistically significant differences in anxiety levels after intervention. These results indicate that mindfulness meditation helps adolescents manage their emotional responses to psychosocial pressures. These findings are relevant in the case of adolescents undergoing legal rehabilitation, as anxiety often arises in response to uncertainty about the future, social stigma, and the demands of adapting to an institutional environment (Amalia & Nuqul, 2020; Dewi et al., 2022).

Anxiety in adolescents in conflict with the law is not a single, isolated phenomenon. Complex interactions among psychological developmental factors, social pressures, and an unsupportive environment shape it. The unstable process of identity formation during adolescence, combined with immature coping strategies, increases vulnerability to emotional disorders, including anxiety (WHO, 2019; Shannon, 2017). This situation is exacerbated by experiences with the legal system and the associated social stigma, which can reduce self-efficacy and personal control (Amalia & Nuqul, 2020). Therefore, mindfulness meditation can work through mechanisms that increase awareness of present experiences and reduce excessive cognitive involvement with the past or future. This approach helps individuals observe thoughts and emotions without judgment, making emotional responses more adaptive (Desrosiers et al., 2013; Ayu et al., 2018). These findings reinforce previous research showing that mindfulness serves as a practical, person-oriented emotion regulation strategy, particularly in the context of chronic psychological stress (Candrawati et al., 2018).

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies on adolescent populations in institutional settings. Lekatompessy et al. (2023) reported that mindfulness therapy significantly reduced stress levels in adolescents in orphanages. Dewi (2018) showed that mindfulness training increased self-awareness and reduced self-silencing in late adolescent girls. These studies reinforce mindfulness's relevance as a psychological intervention for adolescents facing social and emotional pressures across different institutional contexts.

Furthermore, this study aligns with research that views mindfulness as a protective factor and a moderator of the relationship between religiosity and stress. Handayani (2021) showed that mindfulness can strengthen the influence of religiosity on stress reduction. Mindfulness serves as an internal mechanism that helps individuals interpret life experiences more adaptively. This function is crucial for adolescents in conflict with the law, as they often face limitations in external control over their lives.

Mindfulness meditation can be considered a safe, easy-to-implement, non-pharmacological intervention that is consistent with the promotive-preventive principles of adolescent mental health nursing. The integration of mindfulness into institutional rehabilitation programs has the potential to support emotional regulation, increase self-efficacy, and strengthen adolescents' readiness for social reintegration, especially when combined with psychological counseling and social skills training (Candrawati et al., 2018; Dewi et al., 2022).

4. Conclusion

Research shows that mindfulness meditation therapy has a significant effect in reducing anxiety levels in adolescents in conflict with the law at the Paramita Mataram Center. The findings confirm the contribution of mindfulness as a relevant non-pharmacological psychological intervention in the context of adolescent rehabilitation, particularly in helping to regulate emotions, increase self-awareness, and reduce anxiety responses arising from psychosocial stress and uncertainty about the future. The study's results demonstrate the potential for integrating mindfulness meditation into holistic rehabilitation programs for adolescents in conflict with the law. However, the limitations of the pre-experimental design without a

control group and the relatively short duration of the intervention limit the generalization of the findings and the evaluation of long-term impacts. Further research is recommended to use a stronger experimental design, include a comparison group, and explore the continuous, integrated implementation of mindfulness alongside other psychosocial approaches to deepen understanding of the intervention's effectiveness and mechanisms.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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