Effectiveness of Self-Help Books for Improving Santris' Mental Health Literacy

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ABSTRACT

Mental health literacy is needed so that Santris better understands the dynamics within themselves and knows the risk factors that can disrupt their mental health. The growth of Santri's psycho-social problems such as bullying, theft, and running away from the dormitory is not far from mental health literacy, especially in managing mood. The obstacles experienced by Islamic boarding schools are the density of education programs and the need for more human resources, such as guidance and counseling teachers in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, researchers offer a solution through developing a self-help book. The research aims to test self-help books to increase mental health literacy. The method used was quasi-experimental with a sample of 58 santris at the Peradaban Islamic Boarding School. Sample selection was carried out using purposive sampling. Mental health literacy was measured using a Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ). The Self-Help book has been proven effective for developing Santris' mental health literacy, based on differences in mental health literacy scores before ($\bar{x}$ =114) and after($\bar{x}$ =119) Santris read and follow guided exercises in self-help books ($p = .000$, $p < .05$). The change in the mental health literacy dimension that has increased the most is the *resource dimension* (ability to manage self and maintain mental health). The experience of reading and following the guidelines in self-help books makes Santris more capable of managing themselves, as well as having basic skills in coping strategies.

Keywords: Mental health; Literacy; Self-help

ABSTRAK

Literasi kesehatan mental diperlukan agar santri lebih memahami dinamika dalam dirinya dan mengetahui faktor risiko yang dapat mengganggu kesehatan mental. Meningkatnya permasalahan psikososial santri seperti perundungan, pencurian, dan kabur dari asrama tidak jauh dari literasi kesehatan mental khususnya dalam mengelola suasana hati. Kendala yang dialami pesantren adalah padatnya program pendidikan dan perlunya sumber daya manusia yang lebih banyak, seperti guru bimbingan dan konseling di pesantren. Oleh karena itu, peneliti menawarkan solusi melalui pengembangan buku *self-help*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji buku self-help dalam meningkatkan literasi kesehatan mental. Metode yang digunakan adalah quasi eksperimen dengan sampel sebanyak 58 santri Pondok Pesantren Peradaban. Pemilihan sampel dilakukan dengan menggunakan *purposive sampling*. Literasi kesehatan mental diukur menggunakan *Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire* (MHLQ). Hasil penelitian membuktikan bahwa s*elf-help book* terbukti efektif untuk mengembangkan literasi kesehatan mental santri, berdasarkan perbedaan rerata skor literasi kesehatan mental sebelum ($\bar{x}$ =114) dan sesudah ($\bar{x}$ =119) santri membaca dan mengikuti latihan terbimbing pada *self-help book* (p = .000, p < .05). Perubahan dimensi literasi kesehatan mental yang paling meningkat adalah dimensi *resources* (kemampuan mengelola diri dan mememlihara kesehatan mental). Pengalaman membaca dan mengikuti pedoman dalam *self-help book* menjadikan santri lebih mampu mengelola diri, serta memiliki keterampilan dasar dalam strategi *coping*.

Kata kunci: Kesehatan Mental; Literasi; *Self-Help*

INTRODUCTION

Santris' awareness of mental health needs attention to provide proper student support and care. Adolescence is seen as vulnerable to stress, conflict, and psycho-social problems. For Santri, this becomes more risky because of their life patterns, which are different from those of teenagers. Santri must be more independent and responsible in making decisions and solving problems and adapt quickly to environments with diverse backgrounds. Fitriani et al. (2020) explained that 5-10% of Santri have yearly problems adjusting. In the context of development, teenagers who have difficulty adjusting are vulnerable to experiencing stress and engaging in risky behavior.

During adolescence, the prevalence of mental health problems increases. This requires attention because it will seriously impact the individual and societal levels. Awareness of mental health is essential for teenagers to develop. In Islamic boarding school students, the prevalence of depression is higher compared to teenagers in general (Kamiliyah & Ervina, 2015). Wahab et al. explained that 39.7% of boarding school students experienced depression, 67.1% experienced anxiety, and the remainder experienced stress related to academic, interpersonal life, relationships with teachers, learning, and social classes (Adawiyah & Ni'matuzahroh, 2016; Mahfar et al., 2019).

The low level of attention to mental health issues is due to stigma and misunderstanding of mental health. Mental health is not only related to mental disorders but also healthy mental conditions as a form of well-being, such as individuals who exercise diligently, do not smoke, are devout in worship, and frequently have contact with friends (Ryff, 2014).

Mental health literacy is needed so Santri can better understand internal dynamics and the risk factors that can disrupt their mental health. Jorm (2019) explains mental health literacy as a person's capacity to understand and manage the symptoms of mental problems experienced and take preventive measures. Santri, who is weak in mental health literacy, will make mistakes in managing stress, which can influence destructive behavior. Faqih (2019) states that santris tend to be weak in coping with stress and focus on seeking pleasure to overcome the pressures they face.

The growing of psycho-social problems among Santri, such as bullying, stealing, and running away from the dormitory, is not far from mental health literacy, especially in managing mood. Research by Pratiwi et al. (2022) shows that mental health literacy is lacking in teenagers, causing widespread cases such as bullying, smoking, and stealing. Correspondingly, a bad mood and irritability are internal factors that significantly impact Santri's mental weakness (Zahro, 2022). Can it be understood that knowledge about managing emotions and moods constitutes content important for Santri's education?

The problem of mental health literacy discovered by the author at Peradaban Islamic Boarding School Serang is that the essential ability of Santri to manage mental problems is around 40%. The psycho-social problems found by the school counselor were aggression, bullying, and inappropriate behavior. Islamic boarding schools do not have special services

or programs to address Santris' mental health problems. What they do have is strengthening the spirit (ruhiyah) with daily activities (diniyah).

Another pattern used to maintain Santris' mental health is through mental guidance (Bina Mental). The concept of mental health is understood as a science that is used to solve mental problems so that people can face various life difficulties and try to keep their hearts clean. Implementation carried out, for example, at the Syafi'iyah Islamic Boarding School in Cisambeng Majalengka, mental development is carried out in the form of 1) conducting dialogue and making contracts for students' behavior during boarding, 2) assisting students in interpreting life and understanding their character so that they can control themselves and develop it in positive ways, 3) determining the continuation of the boarding school, and 4) providing recommendations regarding the knowledge that students should pursue to equip themselves according to the students' talents and interests (Supriadi, 2017).

Maintaining Santris's mental health is as important as maintaining physical health and is the responsibility of educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools. A common problem that occurs in Islamic boarding schools is the lack of access to mental health services. Ideally, educational institutions are ideal for teenagers to develop mental health literacy (Kutcher et al., 2016). Various previous studies regarding strengthening Santris' mental health were also directed at strengthening spirituality and worship. Strengthening mental health literacy should also be done through a psycho-educational approach (Pratiwi et al., 2022).

The obstacles experienced by Islamic boarding schools are the density of education programs and the need for more human resources, such as guidance and counseling teachers in Islamic boarding schools. Falasifah & Syafitri (2021) prove that compared to public stigma, mental health literacy has more influence on the attitudes of Unisula Islamic Boarding School students towards professional psychological assistance. The research recommends that students get an overview of counseling sessions, how to get psychological help, alternative psychological help, and the right time to get psychological aid.

Nida and Labibah (2021) conducted research at the Miftahul Huda Islamic Boarding School to strengthen students' resilience and mental health. The results of this research indicate the need for holistic interventions in Islamic boarding schools. In fostering students' mental health, the boarding school uses a religious approach and must involve social,

educational, and health approaches (Yuniasih et al., 2023). The use of self-help books in this research implements an educational and mental health approach through educational media.

A *self-help book* is a guidebook containing information about the self-recovery process related to personal and emotional problems. Self-help books also help to anticipate the impact of psychological problems so that they do not get worse. The self-help book in the research is a psycho-educational medium regarding mental health issues, early detection of symptoms of mental problems, and the basic skills needed to deal with mental health problems. Self-help is used to provide literacy and maintain a healthy mental condition. Santri, as readers, are seen as individuals who are learning to develop themselves.

Therefore, researchers offer a solution through the development of a self-help book. *Self-help books* can be used as a source of bibliotherapy, helping to identify mental health problems and learning to overcome them (McLean, 2015). Parks & Szanto (2013) also show that self-help books help clients to understand and overcome symptoms of depression early and be considered realistic in everyday life.

In developing mental health literacy, self-help books are independent resources that make it easier for students to recognize and respond to mental health problems. The self-help book provides a comprehensive overview of popular terms among adolescents in the context of mental health based on existing literature. The Self-help book also presents strategies for dealing with problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, and mental health/well-being in general (Levin et al., 2020). Self-help refers to self-help-based interventions where students can independently use books as a guide personally and whenever needed (Fleming et al., 2018). In this way, this intervention can facilitate Santris' access to understanding mental conditions and training themselves to maintain mental health.

Based on this explanation, the researcher wanted to test the effectiveness of the self-help book in increasing Santri's mental health literacy. Apart from that, it is hoped that it can become a psycho-educational source for developing Santris's mental health literacy. The hypothesis proposed in the research is that self-help books can increase students' mental health literacy.

METHODS

This research uses a quasi-experimental method to test a self-help book developed to increase Santris' mental health literacy (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Research tests the effectiveness of the self-help book compiled by the research team titled "Solusinya Di Kamu." The research design used a one-group pre-test and post-test design, consist of 1) a preliminary study regarding mental health literacy and conducting a pre-test, 2) developing an intervention (self-help book), 3) intervention using self-help books in classical guidance and assignment settings, and 4) conducting a post-test on mental health literacy (Sugiyono, 2012).

The research was strategically conducted at Peradaban Islamic Boarding School, a setting that holds particular relevance for our audience of guidance and counseling teachers. The research population is high school-level Santri Peradaban Islamic Boarding School, a group that is often the focus of our collective efforts. The research population was 58 Santris consisting of X, XI, and XII classes. Researchers used purposive samples so that all Santri at every level were used as the research sample. As stated by Arikunto (2010), if the population is less than 100 people, all members of the population should be sampled. The aim of using this sample is so that the self-help book can be used in classical guidance settings so that it becomes a preventive effort carried out by guidance and counseling teachers.

Our research data regarding mental health literacy was meticulously measured using the Mental Health Literacy Questionnaire (MHLQ) to be adapted and revalidated (Campos et al., 2016). Dimensions that are measured through this instrument are Knowledge, Beliefs, and Resources (Jorm, 2019). The knowledge dimension is the ability to correctly identify the characteristics of a healthy or disturbed mental state, and it is related to knowledge about ways to maintain good mental health. The Beliefs dimension is the attitude towards mental health issues and the ability to overcome fears about mental health problems. Resource is a dimension that refers to the ability to manage oneself and maintain mental health. Every Dimension was measured using a Likert scale. Validity test results using The RASCH model show that 7 questionnaire items do not meet the minimum of two acceptance criteria (Sumintono & Widhiarso, 2014). Thus, in carrying out this research, the questionnaire used to measure Santris' mental health literacy consists of 41 items.

The Self-Help Book "Solusinya di Kamu" was tested on a limited basis among guidance and counseling media experts. At this stage, the researcher received reviews and input regarding the feasibility, relevance, and attractiveness of the content in the self-help book design that will be used, especially regarding the layout and appearance of the book. After the revision process, the researcher first introduced the self-help book that had been prepared for the Santri, guided them on how to use it, and invited the students to read and follow the activities compiled in the self-help book. This process was carried out for one month. The final stage is to conduct a post-test and evaluation to ensure that the self-help book "Solusinya di Kamu" can be a guide in increasing mental health literacy. Data analysis was carried out statistically by carrying out a difference test (t-test) assisted with SPSS version 20.0 software. The test conditions used are if the t_{stat} value is greater than the t_{table} ($t_{stat} > tt_{able}$) at a significance level of 5% then H_0 is rejected (Arikunto, 2010), which means the Self-help book is effective in increasing students' mental health literacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research began by collecting baseline data regarding Santri's mental health literacy. The preliminary data results show that Santris generally has moderate mental health literacy. The distribution of mental health literacy obtained during the pretest is presented in Table 1.

Based on the data in Table 1, it is known that 75.86% of the sample had a moderate mental health literacy level, 17.24% in the high category, and the remaining 6.90% in the low category. It is understood that Peradaban Islamic Boarding School Santris generally needs to develop mental health literacy. Generally, centers have basic knowledge about mental health, but this is still limited. They make efforts to maintain mental health independently, and there is a stigma towards mental health problems. At a moderate level, adolescents have basic knowledge of mental health but do not fully understand it. Their curiosity about mental health literacy causes them to independently seek related information through information media because they need mental health information and need to seek professional help (Handayani et al., 2021).

Next, the Santris read and followed the guidelines in the self-help book, which was successfully compiled and entitled "Solusinya Di Kamu (Sebuah Literasi Kesehatan Mental

Bagi Remaja)". This book contains around 40 pages, designed to make it easier to access and not burden Santris with reading many concepts. In the self-help book, the concept of mental health is presented based on positive psychology, with the hope that Santris can be more accepting of unpleasant situations that occur as part of the dynamics of life and the exercises given as part of self-monitoring. Implementation of the intervention begins with socialization of the use of self-help books, reading and following instructions in self-help books, and ends with reflection on reading activities. Santris read and followed the guidelines in the self-help book for about a month. The Reflection activities are carried out in the middle of the month and at the end of the month.

The data obtained after Santri read and followed the guide in the self-help book shows a change in mental health literacy. Some Santri are getting high, and others are still in the low category. The mental health literacy profile obtained during the posttest is presented in Table 1.

Based on the data in Table 1, it is known that 65.52% of the sample has moderate mental health literacy, 29.31% is in the high category, and 5.17% is in the low category. Understandably, there are changes in each category of mental health literacy. The self-help book helps Santri develop their mental health literacy through the information and exercises provided in the self-help book. A comparison of mental health literacy profiles in the pre-test and post-test is presented in Table 1.

The effectiveness of self-help books in increasing mental health literacy is known based on t-tests. The results of the paired sample t-test can be seen in Table 2. The t-test results in Table 2 above show that p = .000 (p < .05). Thus, the hypothesis H0 is rejected, and H1 is accepted. It can be concluded that self-help books effectively increase Santris' mental health literacy.

Research has shown a significant increase in Santris' mental health literacy after reading and following the exercises in the self-help book "Solusinya Di Kamu." The self-help book was developed as a psychoeducational medium so that Santris has good mental health literacy, especially in knowledge and skills related to managing emotions.

Table 1.

Comparison of Mental Health Literacy Profiles

Level of Mental Health Literacy	Range Score	N	
		Pre-test	Post-test
Low	≤ 82	4	3
Moderate	83-122	44	38
High	≥ 123	10	17

Table 2.

Effectiveness of Self-help Books

	M	p	N
Pretest	114.82		58
Posttest	117.46		58
Pretest-Posttest		.000	58

Note. Hypothesis tested by t-test.

Self-help books have been proven to increase students' mental health literacy. As stated by McCullis, self-books help individuals develop self-awareness, psychological insight, and growth and become tools for solving problems (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013). As part of bibliotherapy, self-help books function as "educational and didactic efforts" in psychological therapy (Tanrikulu, 2011)

Self-help books are designed to provide concise and applicable guidance for individuals who want to improve their personal or professional lives. The main strength of self-help books lies in content that inspires and motivates readers to take action to achieve their goals and provides strategies and practical steps for personal growth (Sánchez-Meca et al., 2010). Self-help books are valued for their straight-to-the-point advice. They distill complex concepts into more understandable and actionable steps. This characteristic makes these books accessible to a broad audience, regardless of readers' prior knowledge of the topic.

As stated by Utami and Fitriyani in their research, self-help books can help class XII santris regulate emotions (Utami & Fitriyani, 2019). The research used self-help books for the Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT) intervention. Meanwhile, in this research, the self-help book was developed as part of a cognitive intervention, specifically biblio counseling.

The development of the self-help book refers to Richardson's view, which states that a self-help book based on cognitive behavioral therapy has the potential to provide quality psychological services for emotional problems and prevent depression (Richardson et al.,

2010). As a medium for developing mental health literacy, self-help books are structured with two emphases: information based on positive psychology and self-monitoring (Parks & Szanto, 2013).

Therefore, the self-help book "Solusinya Di Kamu" does not discuss the symptoms of mental disorders much; instead, it provides information related to maintaining a healthy mentality and efforts to recognize yourself and the situation you are facing to be wiser in making decisions. In the self-help book, the concept of mental health is presented based on positive psychology, with the hope that Santris can be more accepting of unpleasant situations that occur as part of the dynamics of life and the exercises given as part of self-monitoring.

For example, part one of the self-help book discusses "*Apakah kita sehat secara mental?*". In this section, readers are guided to understand the characteristics of a healthy mentality and what differentiates someone from being mentally healthy. It ends with self-monitoring in the form of a mental health check-in.

The self-help book is designed in this format to encourage Santris to read and do "therapeutic reading." Therapeutic reading not only adds information and insight but also stimulates dialogue about mental health issues, communicates new perspectives, and provides experience in finding solutions that come from oneself (Bruneau & Pehrsson, 2017).

It is believed that self-help books can be a resource for teenagers to overcome stress, anxiety, and other psychological challenges through the introduction of coping strategies (Lisle, 2019). As Levin also stated, self-help books must present strategies for dealing with problems such as depression, anxiety, stress, and mental health/well-being in general (Levin et al., 2020).

The development of the "resource" dimension in mental health literacy is also based on the view that the problems that arise from low mental health literacy itself are the wrong way of handling a problem (coping) that can even be dangerous, such as using non-prescription drugs, drinking alcoholic drinks, consulting to the shaman, and so on. In the context of Santri's life, what is commonly done is coping by skipping class, running away from the dormitory, smoking, or bullying as a way of expressing strength.

As a psychoeducational medium, self-help books have strengths in the perspective presented, the guidance and exercises, and considering the therapeutic relationship. As Marín-Díaz (2017) discussed, "self-help" refers to the activities and mental exercises individuals undertake to understand themselves better, regulate their emotions, and increase their competence in various areas of life. However, self-help books are not a substitute for professional help, so Santris, who experiences severe or critical mental problems, must still be given professional intervention. Self-help books also require adjustments to motivate readers to make better changes.

Starker describes the factors that make self-help books enjoyable as psychoeducational media. a.) self-help is cost-effective, i.e., cheaper than consulting a professional; b) accessible whenever someone needs help; c) more privacy is maintained for clients to explore their problems; d) Self-help books provide joy for readers, and the information obtained can be shared with others (Sharma, 2023). Of these factors, the primary key is ease of access and enjoyment in reading self-help books.

The challenge faced in using self-help books is the motivation of the students. Apodaca & Miller's (2003) research tested a self-help book intervention in bibliotherapy for alcoholics, and the diverse motivations of the participants greatly influenced the research results. Thus, the relevance of the reading topic is crucial in preparing a self-help book. Generally, readers already have the target information they want to solve their problems, so they strategically choose reading material. There is also a tendency to look for insight, inspiration, and practical advice that can be added to the coping process.

Developing a self-help book pays attention to at least two main aspects of therapeutic relationships: building and maintaining them. *Building relationships* is an aspect that makes readers feel interested and engaged, and they need the content and exercises presented in the Self-help book. Maintaining relationships is an aspect that makes readers consistent and involved in the activities suggested in the self-help book.

The efforts made in the research are as much as possible, as the content compiled in the self-help book follows the need to develop mental health literacy and the daily problems experienced by students. Next, socialization is carried out to create rapport so that students know the reasons for reading and following the exercises in the Self-help book.

This research carried out the anticipation by conducting socialization and discussions with students. During the socialization, the research team built a perspective on the importance of mental health literacy and the benefits of self-help books to increase reader motivation, as well as getting several questions regarding how to complete the exercises on the worksheet. Researchers also received input regarding the images presented in self-help books, which should be in color and, for example, use images of teenagers or students so that they are closer to students' lives.

The therapeutic relationship is maintained by considering the arrangement and amount of content presented. Theoretically and practically, research has implications for compiling and writing content strategies. Self-help is written in everyday language with easy-to-follow exercises. It provides a simple step-by-step guide to give readers the tools to understand and manage themselves. There are also quite a few stories of authentic experiences in Self-help books that inspire understanding of situations and hope for readers who experience similar symptoms (Richardson et al., 2010)

The weaknesses when using self-help books as a medium for developing mental health literacy are 1) there are differences in personal preferences, 2) they still require professional help, and 3) readers' perspectives on the content may be different. Thus, the use of self-help books needs to be strengthened through reflection so that it can help counselors adjust to the therapeutic process.

A limitation of the research is that the change in the average mental health literacy score is not very large, but still has good significance. To increase mental health literacy more optimally, mentoring and reflection can be carried out, because one of the aspects that most encourages the usefulness of self-help books is the relevance of the book to the client's personal preferences.

CONCLUSION

The Self-Help Book has been proven effective for developing Santris' mental health literacy. The change in mental health literacy that has increased the most is the resource dimension. The experience of reading and following the guidelines in the self-help book makes Santri more capable of managing themselves and having basic skills in dealing with mental health problems (coping). The self-help book produced by the research becomes a

resource for maintaining students' mental health through developing mental health literacy. Research suggests that self-help books must be easy for students to access and follow. Also, the structure and appearance of a book affect how easy it is for readers to use. This research contributes to the development of psycho-educational media related to mental health, both theoretically and practically. Recommendations for future researchers are to reduce the sample size and test the self-help book in a single subject design to make it easier to measure changes and get input for developing more relevant therapies.

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