



Enhancing Emotion Regulation among Orphanage Adolescents through Mindfulness Training and Expressive Writing: A Community Service Initiative

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Abstract: This community service program aims to improve emotion regulation among adolescents residing in an orphanage through mindfulness training and expressive writing while evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design with a control group was employed involving 35 adolescents aged 12–18 years, who were allocated to a mindfulness group ($n = 13$), an expressive writing group ($n = 12$), and a control group ($n = 10$). The interventions were delivered through brief, structured group sessions facilitated within the orphanage setting. Emotion regulation was assessed using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ), adapted from Gross and John (2003), which measures the dimensions of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Data were analyzed using Welch's ANOVA followed by the Games-Howell post hoc test. Pretest scores showed no significant differences among the groups, indicating comparable baseline conditions. In contrast, posttest results revealed significant between-group differences, with both intervention groups achieving significantly higher emotion regulation scores than the control group, whereas no significant difference was found between the mindfulness and expressive writing groups. These findings suggest that mindfulness training and expressive writing are practical, low-cost psychosocial interventions for strengthening emotion regulation among adolescents in orphanage settings. Although the program was limited by a relatively small sample size, the quasi-experimental design, a short intervention period, and the absence of follow-up assessment, both interventions demonstrate potential for integration into routine psychosocial services through basic training for caregivers and orphanage staff, thereby supporting sustainable implementation with minimal resources.

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Introduction

Promoting mental health among adolescents living in orphanages requires a transformative approach that integrates psychological knowledge, feasible psychosocial interventions, and structured guidance within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), with relevance to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Psychosocial support for adolescents is no longer limited to addressing emotional problems, but should also be oriented toward strengthening adaptive capacities that enable them to recognize, express, and regulate emotions in response to daily stressors. In this context, mindfulness training and expressive writing emerge as practical psychological interventions, as they enable adolescents to develop present-moment awareness, process emotional experiences constructively, reduce emotional burden, and improve emotion regulation in a simple, low-cost, and contextually appropriate manner.



The urgency of such interventions is reflected in the high prevalence of mental health problems among children and adolescents. Globally, one in seven children and adolescents experiences mental health problems (The United Nations Office at Geneva, 2024). Wahdi et al. (2023), based on findings from the I-NAMHS survey, reported that approximately 15.5 million adolescents, or 34.9%, experience mental health problems. Among adolescents, the most common problems include depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders (Blakemore, 2019; WHO, 2023). Adjustment ability has been regarded as a protective factor that helps adolescents cope with psychological distress and reduces the risk of developing mental health problems (Lu et al., 2025). However, adjustment does not develop in isolation; rather, it is shaped by various psychological processes that enable individuals to respond to environmental demands in flexible and effective ways (Di Giunta et al., 2022; Martínez-Libano et al., 2025).

Adjustment problems are a major concern among adolescents, including those living in orphanages (Shekhawat & Gopalan, 2023). Adolescents residing in orphanages are in a developmental stage that requires mature social adaptation, yet they often face complex and challenging life circumstances (Sabrina et al., 2025). Many of these adolescents live in orphanages due to parental death or divorce, economic hardship, or family disharmony (Sagita et al., 2022). Such conditions place considerable demands on their capacity to adapt effectively.

During adolescence, developmental tasks such as identity formation, increasing autonomy, and adjustment to changing social relationships may give rise to intense emotional experiences (Rizki & Keliat, 2021). One psychological process that plays a central role in adjustment is emotion regulation, defined as the ability to recognize, monitor, and modify emotional experiences and expressions in ways that remain aligned with personal goals and situational demands (Gross & John, 2003). In this context, successful adjustment is strongly influenced by how adolescents manage the emotions that emerge in response to everyday stressors.

Emotion regulation is considered an important mechanism that links stressful experiences to adaptive responses, including among adolescents living in orphanages. It helps individuals maintain direction and select appropriate problem-solving strategies (Pujianahum et al., 2025). Previous studies have consistently identified emotion regulation as a predictor of interpersonal competence, resilience, and forgiveness among adolescents in orphanage settings (Arnesty & Pedhu, 2023; Laura & Ulfah, 2020). These findings suggest that effective emotion regulation is essential for adolescents residing in orphanages.

The need to strengthen emotion regulation among adolescents in orphanages is not always accompanied by adequate psychological services. Limitations in professional staffing, mentoring time, and institutional resources often hinder the implementation of sustainable psychosocial development programs. This highlights the importance of interventions that are feasible within the orphanage context, namely those that are structured, easy to replicate, deliverable in group formats, and relatively cost-effective while remaining grounded in scientific approaches. Previous studies indicate that emotion regulation can be enhanced through mindfulness and expressive writing interventions (Yusainy et al., 2019; Jacques & Alves, 2025).

One intervention with the potential to improve emotion regulation is mindfulness training. Mindfulness refers to the capacity to intentionally direct attention to present-moment experiences, including thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, with an attitude of acceptance and nonjudgment (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Through mindfulness practice, individuals



may become more aware of their daily positive experiences, foster acceptance of emotional experiences, and ultimately improve psychological well-being (Björkstrand et al., 2019; Lindsay et al., 2018; Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020; Jobin et al., 2025). Mindfulness training is also relatively feasible in orphanage settings because it can be administered in groups through structured sessions.

In addition to mindfulness, expressive writing represents another practical and low-cost approach to supporting emotional management. Expressive writing refers to the activity of writing about one's deepest thoughts and feelings regarding meaningful or distressing experiences (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). This approach may facilitate adjustment to stress through improvements in emotion regulation and cognitive change, such as habituation to negative emotions and cognitive restructuring, although its effectiveness may vary across contexts (Kupeli et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2023). Therefore, expressive writing has the potential to reduce emotional burden and strengthen adolescents' capacity to regulate emotions more adaptively. In the orphanage context, this intervention is also feasible because it requires minimal resources and can be implemented through structured guidance.

Both mindfulness and expressive writing interventions can be implemented within a single day. Previous studies have shown that brief mindfulness sessions can improve mood and resilience while reducing stress and anxiety levels (Gilmartin et al., 2017; Miller-Chagnon et al., 2024). Likewise, brief expressive writing sessions have been found to enhance positive self-evaluation (Adachi & Toshima, 2024). Accordingly, the implementation of mindfulness and expressive writing in brief, one-day sessions appears to be both feasible and potentially beneficial in producing positive psychological outcomes for participants.

Although mindfulness and expressive writing have frequently been reported as potentially effective in improving emotional management, empirical evidence specifically examining these two interventions among adolescents in orphanage settings remains limited. Mindfulness emphasizes awareness and acceptance of present emotional experiences, whereas expressive writing emphasizes emotional expression and meaning-making through narrative. A comparative examination of these two approaches is therefore relevant for identifying which intervention is more effective in improving emotion regulation among adolescents residing in orphanages.

The partner in this community service program was an orphanage that provides residential care for adolescents from diverse social and family backgrounds. Preliminary observations and discussions with the orphanage management indicated that many adolescents experienced difficulties in regulating their emotions, which were reflected in frequent interpersonal conflicts, impulsive reactions, and challenges in coping with academic and daily life stress. The management also expressed the need for practical and structured activities that could help adolescents develop healthier emotional regulation skills, highlighting the importance of implementing an evidence-based intervention in this setting.

Based on the foregoing, this community service program was designed to strengthen emotion regulation among adolescents living in orphanages through brief mindfulness training and expressive writing activities. Based on the identified needs, this community service program aimed to enhance the emotion regulation capacity of adolescents living in the orphanage through brief mindfulness training and expressive writing activities by providing practical psychosocial support that could be implemented in a simple, low-cost, and group-based format. The implementation of the program was evaluated using a quasi-



experimental pretest-posttest design with a control group to assess changes in adolescents' emotion regulation following participation in the intervention.

Method

This community service activity consisted of mindfulness training and expressive writing sessions, and its implementation was evaluated using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design (Adams, 2014; Marcus et al., 2001). The service program was implemented in an orphanage involving 35 adolescent residents ($N = 35$), who were assigned to the mindfulness ($n = 13$), expressive writing ($n = 12$), and control ($n = 10$) groups. Eligible participants were adolescents aged 12-18 years who resided in the orphanage and voluntarily agreed to participate in the program. The activity focused on strengthening emotion regulation through two brief interventions, namely mindfulness training and expressive writing. The evaluation component was conducted to determine whether the implemented service activities produced measurable changes in adolescents' emotion regulation. Participants were assigned into three groups: the mindfulness training group, the expressive writing group, and the control group. Because the program was conducted in a natural institutional setting where full randomization was not feasible, this evaluation design was considered appropriate for assessing the outcomes of the community service activity under real-world conditions.

The main source of data in this study was the participants' responses to the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) developed by Gross & John (2003) and adapted by Radde et al. (2021). The ERQ consists of 10 items measuring cognitive reappraisal (6 items) and expressive suppression (4 items), using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data were collected through pretest and posttest administration of the ERQ. After the pretest, the mindfulness group received mindfulness training, the expressive writing group received expressive writing exercises, and the control group received no intervention. Both interventions were designed in a brief format that could be completed within one day, making them feasible for implementation in the orphanage context. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and assumption testing, including the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. Since the homogeneity assumption for posttest scores was not met, differences in emotion regulation scores across groups were analyzed using Welch's ANOVA, followed by the Games-Howell post hoc test to identify pairwise group differences.

Result and Discussion

The results of this community service activity are presented based on the implementation outcomes and evaluation findings. The main focus of the program was to support adolescents in recognizing, expressing, and regulating their emotions through structured group activities. During the one-day program, the group sessions were conducted in a supportive and interactive atmosphere that encouraged participants to engage actively in the activities. At the beginning of the sessions, several adolescents appeared hesitant to express their thoughts and emotions; however, as the activities progressed, participants became more comfortable sharing their experiences and engaging in group discussions. The mindfulness sessions were generally characterized by calm participation and focused attention, whereas the expressive writing sessions enabled participants to reflect on and articulate their personal emotional experiences. Facilitators observed increasing openness and active involvement throughout the program, while orphanage caregivers expressed positive



impressions regarding the participants' enthusiasm and the practicality of the activities, indicating that the intervention was feasible to implement within the orphanage setting. Quantitative evaluation was then conducted to examine changes in emotion regulation scores before and after the activities.

Table 1. Demographic Data Analysis (n = 35)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ages	12	1	2,9
	13	7	20,0
	14	10	28,6
	15	4	11,4
	16	8	22,9
	17	2	5,7
	18	3	8,6
Origin	Within Province	22	62,85
	Outside Province	13	37,15

Based on Table 1, the total number of participants in this study was 35 adolescents aged 12–18 years. The largest age group was 14 years old, consisting of 10 participants (28.6%), followed by 16 years old with 8 participants (22.9%) and 13 years old with 7 participants (20.0%). Furthermore, there were 4 participants aged 15 years (11.4%), 3 participants aged 18 years (8.6%), 2 participants aged 17 years (5.7%), and 1 participant aged 12 years (2.9%). In terms of origin, most participants came from within the province, totaling 22 individuals (62.85%), while the remaining 13 participants (37.15%) came from outside the province.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis

		Pretest			Posttest			
Group	M	EW	C	Total	M	EW	C	Total
N	13	12	10	35	13	12	10	35
Range	15	11	8	15	16	14	8	16
Minimum	29	30	33	29	28	30	28	28
Maximum	44	41	41	44	44	44	36	44
Mean	36,538	35,416	37,1	36,314	37,3	36,583	31,8	35,485
Standard Deviation	4,195	4,01	2,514	3,684	5,039	5,583	2,573	5,147

Note: M = Mindfulness, EW = Expressive Writing, C = Control.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of emotion regulation in the orphanage setting. Based on Table 2, the total number of participants in this study was 35, divided into three groups: Mindfulness (13 participants), Expressive Writing (12 participants), and Control (10 participants). At the pretest stage, the scores ranged from 29 to 44 (total range = 15). The pretest means showed that the control group had the highest mean score (Mean = 37.1), followed by the mindfulness group (Mean = 36.538) and the expressive writing group (Mean = 35.416). Overall, the mean pretest score was 36.314, indicating that the initial conditions of the three groups were relatively similar.

At the posttest stage, the total scores ranged from 28 to 44 (total range = 16). The mindfulness group showed the highest mean score (Mean = 37.3), followed by the expressive writing group (Mean = 36.583), whereas the control group had a lower mean score (Mean = 31.8). The overall posttest mean was 35.485. Descriptively, these results indicate that after the intervention, the intervention groups (Mindfulness and Expressive Writing) had higher posttest scores than the control group.

**Table 3. Normality and Homogeneity Tests**

Pre/Post	Group	Shapiro-Wilk Significance	Homogeneity Significance
Pretest	Mindfulness	0,479	0,069
	Expressive writing	0,122	
	Control	0,721	
Posttest	Mindfulness	0,245	0,013
	Expressive writing	0,051	
	Control	0,234	

Normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk method. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test is appropriate for small samples, generally fewer than 50 participants (Mishra et al., 2019). In the decision-making criteria, data are considered normally distributed when the significance value is greater than 0.05 (Sihotang, 2023). Based on Table 3, the pretest and posttest results in all groups met the assumption of normality ($\text{sig.} > 0.05$).

Furthermore, the homogeneity test was conducted to determine whether the groups came from populations with equal variances (Sihotang, 2023). Table 3 shows that the significance value for the pretest was $0.069 > 0.05$, indicating that the data were homogeneous. However, for the posttest, the significance value was $0.013 < 0.05$, indicating that the data were not homogeneous. Therefore, Welch's ANOVA was performed because the posttest data did not meet the assumption of homogeneity.

Table 4. Welch ANOVA Test

Pre/Post		Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Pretest	Welch	0,696	2	21,143	0,509
Posttest	Welch	7,412	2	20,319	0,004

Based on Table 4, the results of Welch's ANOVA showed that at the pretest stage there was no significant difference among the groups ($\text{sig.} = 0.509 > 0.05$), indicating that the three groups could be considered equivalent at baseline. In contrast, at the posttest stage there was a significant difference among the groups ($\text{sig.} = 0.004 < 0.05$), indicating differences in outcomes after the treatment. Subsequently, the Games-Howell post hoc test was conducted because the assumption of homogeneity was not met.

Table 5. Games-Howell Post Hoc Test

Pre/Post	(i) Group	(j) Group	Sig.
Pretest	Mindfulness	Expressive writing	0.775
		Control	0.917
	Expressive writing	Mindfulness	0.775
		Control	0.469
	Control	Mindfulness	0.917
		Expressive writing	0.469
Posttest	Mindfulness	Expressive writing	0.939
		Control	0.008
	Expressive writing	Mindfulness	0.939
		Control	0.044
	Control	Mindfulness	0.008
		Expressive writing	0.044

Based on Table 5, the post hoc test results at the pretest stage showed no significant differences across all group pairs ($\text{sig.} > 0.05$), indicating that the three groups were equivalent before treatment. At the posttest stage, there were significant differences between the Mindfulness and Control groups ($\text{sig.} = 0.008$) and between the Expressive Writing and



Control groups (sig. = 0.044). Meanwhile, the Mindfulness and Expressive Writing groups did not show a significant difference (sig. = 0.939).

This study was conducted to examine the effectiveness of interventions in improving emotion regulation among adolescents living in orphanages. The study was divided into three groups: the mindfulness intervention group, the expressive writing group, and the control group. Based on the results of the analysis, the mindfulness intervention group had the highest mean score (37.3) compared with the expressive writing group and the control group.

Based on the descriptive results, the pretest means of the three groups were relatively similar. This finding was reinforced by the results of Welch's ANOVA at pretest, which showed no significant differences among the groups, while the post hoc test also revealed no significant differences across any pair of groups. Thus, prior to the administration of the interventions, the three groups could be considered comparable. Changes observed at posttest were therefore more likely attributable to the effects of the interventions rather than to baseline differences among the groups.

At posttest, the mean scores of the Mindfulness and Expressive Writing groups were higher than those of the Control group. In addition, Welch's ANOVA showed that both the mindfulness and expressive writing interventions differed significantly from the control group. These findings indicate that, following the interventions, participants in the Mindfulness and Expressive Writing groups tended to demonstrate better emotion regulation abilities than those in the Control group. Furthermore, both interventions were considered effective, as there was no significant difference between the Mindfulness and Expressive Writing groups.

Mindfulness was found to be effective in improving emotion regulation. Deplus et al. (2016) explained that mindfulness interventions help reduce dysfunctional emotion regulation strategies and may prevent psychological problems in adolescents. Furthermore, Ulfah & Fourianalistyawati (2025) found that trait mindfulness was significantly associated with more adaptive emotion regulation among adolescents living in orphanages. Mindfulness helps individuals respond to stress and emotional experiences with greater awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). It may enhance emotion regulation by helping adolescents recognize emotions at an earlier stage, creating a "pause" before reacting, and reducing impulsive responses, thereby promoting more adaptive regulation strategies. A nonjudgmental attitude also serves as an important emotion regulation strategy (Chiang et al., 2024). Thus, mindfulness may be regarded as a relevant approach for supporting the healthy development of emotion regulation in adolescents, particularly those living in orphanages.

Expressive writing was also found to be effective in improving emotion regulation. Expressive writing helps individuals regulate emotions and develop knowledge related to emotional management (Irdi et al., 2024). It also reduces the cognitive burden associated with suppressing thoughts and makes individuals less emotionally reactive (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). In addition, Sanjani et al. (2022) explained that expressive writing can help adolescents living in orphanages control their emotions. Expressive writing works by helping adolescents organize emotional experiences into narrative form. Through writing, emotions can be processed more effectively when facing stressful situations, making them easier to manage (Niles et al., 2013). Therefore, expressive writing has the potential to serve as a simple yet relevant intervention for strengthening emotion regulation among adolescents in orphanages through more adaptive emotional processing.

Given the effectiveness of both interventions, orphanage management may integrate these activities into their routine psychosocial support practices. For example, a brief 5–10-



minute mindfulness session can be conducted before bedtime or after evening prayers to help adolescents develop emotional awareness and relaxation, while reflective journals may be provided to encourage weekly expressive writing as a safe medium for emotional expression and self-reflection. These activities require minimal resources and can be facilitated by orphanage caregivers after receiving basic training, thereby supporting the sustainability of the program beyond the initial community service intervention.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, mindfulness training and expressive writing were proven effective in improving emotion regulation among adolescents living in orphanages compared with the control group. At posttest, both intervention groups showed higher emotion regulation scores and differed significantly from the control group. No significant difference was found between mindfulness and expressive writing, suggesting that the two interventions provided relatively comparable benefits. Therefore, both interventions may be considered feasible alternative programs to support the strengthening of emotion regulation among adolescents in orphanage settings.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, mindfulness training and expressive writing are recommended as feasible programs to improve emotion regulation among adolescents living in orphanages, as both interventions are simple, low-cost, and suitable for structured group sessions. Orphanage caregivers, counselors, or facilitators may apply these interventions to help adolescents become more aware of their emotions, express their feelings constructively, and develop more adaptive emotional responses. Future community service programs should focus on training orphanage caregivers to independently facilitate mindfulness and expressive writing activities, integrate these interventions into routine psychosocial support practices, and replicate the program in other orphanages to expand its reach and sustainability.

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