



Positive Psychology Interventions: How Do Alleviate the Symptoms of Depression? - A Literature Review

Aretha Ever Ulitua¹ Cindy Claudia Soen² Irena Monica Hardjasasmita³ Naomi Soetikno^{4*}

^{1,2,3,4}*Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta, Indonesia*

Corresponding Author: Naomi Soetikno, Email: naomis@fpsi.untar.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submitted: 13-05-2022 Accepted: 16-07-2022 Published: 16-09-2022	Depression is a common psychological disorder that can influence a person's feelings, way of thinking, and behavior in a negative way. Furthermore, biological factors, cognitive distortions, negative emotions, and cultural factors are accountable for the rise of depression. The etiology of depression is complex and no single cause can be accounted for. The prevalence of depression begins to rise in adolescence. From the perspective of positive psychology, depression can be viewed as a lack or excess of capabilities, strengths, and autonomy that make the individual focused on the negative side of the past. Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) were initially designed to increase the level of happiness. However, many studies have shown the effectiveness of PPIs to reduce the symptoms of depression. PPIs are based on the assumption that each individual has capacities for growth, fulfillment, and wellbeing. Thus, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of PPIs on depression based on a literature review from the last three years as a research method. The overall results from this review are that PPIs can decrease depression symptoms, adolescents with depression have improvements in other characteristics, and even are in charge of preventing depression.
KEYWORDS	
Depression, Positive psychology intervention, adolescent, Literature Review	

INTRODUCTION

Depression is a common psychological disorder that can influence a person's feelings, way of thinking, and behavior in a negative way (American Psychiatric Association, 2020). It is the most prevalent disorder affecting approximately 4.4 percent of the global population (World Health Organization, 2017). The characteristics of depression include: (a) depressed mood or feeling of sadness; (b) reduced ability to enjoy daily activities; (c) change in appetite; (d) insomnia or hypersomnia; (e) motor agitation or retardation; (f) fatigue; (g) feeling worthless or guilty; (h) difficulty to concentrate and making a decision; and (i) suicidal thoughts (Association & Association, 2013).

The prevalence of depression began to rise in adolescence (Mash & Wolfe, 2010); (Thapar & Collishaw, n.d.). Biological, family, friends, and environment are accountable for the rise of depression, but the etiology of depression is complex and no single cause can be accounted for (Ford et al., 2017); (J. H. Lee, 2018); (Lorenzo et al., 2021); (Zubaidah & MN, 2015); (Rueter et al., 1999); (Sheeber et al., 1997); (Soetikno, 2020), as cited in (Rognli et al., 2020); (Wang et al., 2020). Depression in adolescence can lead to: (a) criminal acts; (b) smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking drugs; (c) suicide; (d) academic problems; (e) career problems; and (f) health problems.

Due to the alarming prevalence rates, much research has been conducted to decrease the symptoms of depression. One of the effective treatments is by using Positive Psychology Intervention (PPIs), thus interest in PPIs has increased as it helps to increase positive aspects of lives. From the perspective of positive psychology, depression can be viewed as a lack or excess of capabilities and strengths (Rueter et al., 1999). Not only focusing on treating depression as a disorder, but depression can

also be treated by seeing individual strength, capacity, source, attribution, and assets to survive and flourish when faced with challenges (M. D. Lee & Wagenmakers, 2014). Therefore, the principle to “*fix what’s wrong*” is replaced by the principle to “*build what’s strong*” (Duckworth, n.d.).

PPIs are focusing on developing positive aspects of lives by increasing positive emotions and behavior (Teixeira & Freire, 2020). Many studies have been conducted and show that PPIs are significantly proven to improve subjective well-being and reduce depression. In another study, (Liang et al., 2012) explored the impact of PPIs on anxiety and the level of happiness. Participants reported an increase in the level of happiness and a decrease in anxiety.

The previous meta-analysis has reported that PPIs can improve mental health, however the results on these outcomes limit their samples to the adult population, the study of its effectiveness in adolescents is still scarce (Tejada-Gallardo et al., 2020). Thus, this review aims to update the current empirical studies that examine the role of PPIs in providing treatment for adolescents’ depression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Depression

Depression is more than just sadness, it links to several symptoms that affect how you think, feel, and handle daily activities. Based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, individuals experience five or more symptoms within 2 weeks such as depressed mood, loss of interest in all or almost activities, significant weight loss, insomnia or hypersomnia almost every day, agitation, fatigue, feeling of worthlessness, and diminished ability to concentrate, and recurrent thoughts of death.

Positive Psychology Intervention (PPIs)

Positive Psychology Interventions have many types of interventions such as gratitude, increasing strengths, and mindfulness with aims to raise positive feelings, cognitive, and behavior (Seear & Vella-Brodrick, 2013). It is believed to be able to improve mental health and be effective in improving psychological and subjective well-being as well as depressive symptoms (Boiler et al., 2013). (Teixeira & Freire, 2020) explored the impact of PPIs on depressed adolescents, the result shows that PPIs can increase life satisfaction and positive feeling. Also, decrease negative feelings. In another study, (Vela et al., 2019) analyzed the impact of PPI and creative art journals. The result stated that all participants after seven weeks of therapy showed improvement in resilience, personal recovery attitude, and reduce depressive symptoms.

METHODS

This review pulls together research and literature relating to the intervention of depression, mainly positive psychology intervention. A framework is used as a guide to identify, select, and review relevant publications in this topic area. A combination of keywords such as depression, positive psychology intervention, and adolescence is used and obtained through electronic databases from APA Psycnet. Articles published between 2019 and 2022 were included. We chose articles from 2019 until 2022 because these articles are more up to date and reflect the newest discoveries, theories, processes, or best practices. The reason we extracted studies from APA Psycnet were because it is widely referenced and cited. APA has 90 scientific and peer-reviewed journals and were linked to hundreds of editors and associate editors with more than 70,000 editorial board members and reviewers as well (American Psychological Association, n.d.). APA Researchers will also implicate other references from textbooks or journals that are considered to be relevant and support this study. We reviewed the full text of the articles and also manually searched for keywords and studies of articles that are eligible for inclusion if the study addresses depression and PPI. This approach is useful and essential to provide an overview of the

relationship between depression and positive psychology intervention as many researchers suggested leveraging positive psychology to provide treatment for those with depression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the aim of this study, we review the articles and three studies are considered relevant to see how Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) could alleviate the symptoms of depression in adolescence. We reviewed the study based on the comprehensive results of the study (See table 1.) Both PPI and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) were adapted to make The Optimal Functioning Therapy for Adolescents (OFTA). OFTA is an individual therapy that is manualized for psychological treatment in adolescents with Major Depressive Disorder ranging from 14 to 17 years old (Teixeira & Freire, 2020). PPIs are used to develop positive feelings, behaviors, or cognition (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Teixeira & Freire, 2020). While CBT is used to identify and challenge maladaptive and positive thoughts (Beck, 1995; Teixeira & Freire, 2020). Within OFTA, three different modules will be given to clients. Modules I will be given to educating about positive emotions, behaviors, and thoughts. Modules II to identify and optimize the client's strengths. Module III to develop flow, hope, and optimism (Teixeira & Freire, 2020).

OFTA seems to be effective not only in decreasing negative trait characteristics of negative affect and depressive symptoms but also to enhance the characteristics of the positive states, such as positive mood, self-satisfaction, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Furthermore, OFTA could increase the frequency and diversification of activities, places, and companies of participants. For instance, participants of the study could engage in activities such as socializing and being more productive, spending more time in public places, and more time with family, friends, and others (Teixeira & Freire, 2020).

One of the notable things is that a high baseline of positive mood may have been one of the factors that related to the therapy's success. Depressed adolescents with a higher positive mood at baseline are more likely to respond to the treatment (Vela et al., 2019). It implies that one of the principles in positive psychology plays the main role in decreasing the symptoms of depression. Thus, it is essential to promote positive emotions at the start of the therapy to ensure therapy's success (Vela et al., 2019). PPIs are seen to be a potential strategy to intervene adolescent population with depression because it not only eliminates the depressive symptoms but also promote optimal function in adolescence.

Another positive psychology intervention program is PEPP. PEPP stands for Positive Education Pilot Program which is an integrated program focused on positive activities, such as "Three Good Things" (Halliday et al., 2020), "Gratitude Letter" (Halliday et al., 2020), "Meaning Through Photography" (Halliday et al., 2020) Halliday, "Counting Kindness" (Otake et al. 2006; Halliday, Kern, Garrett, & Turnbull, 2020), and "Best Possible Selves" (Halliday et al., 2020) to foster positive effect, gratitude, meaning, and optimism. Based on the study, there was only a little evidence of changes in well-being and resilience found. A study by found that the effects of PEPP are stronger when students are engaged in the program and motivated to change. While little evidence of changes in well-being and resilience was found, researchers speculate that PEPP may have had some buffering effect against the decline of mental health. However, changes and differences were not significant.

Some factors give an impact on the practice: (a) not all parts of the PEPP have positive reactions from students; (b) there are different opinions from students and teachers regarding the process of PEPP; (c) some parts of PEPP cause a negative effect in students; (d) teachers are not supported with enough training to deliver the PEPP; (e) gender differences affect attitude toward PEPP; and (f) there is no enough support from school department to run the PEPP (Halliday et al., 2020).

Table 1. Results of the study

Author(s)	Year	Country	Study Design	Population and sample size	Results
Teixeira & Freire	2020	Portugal	Experimental (Experience Sampling Method)	A 14-year-old female with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFTA intervention affected the participant's increase of positive trait characteristics and the reduction of her negative trait characteristics • OFTA also has a significant impact to increase positive mood and self-satisfaction of participant • OFTA intervention impacts the participant to have greater involvement in her several life contexts such as activities, places, and companies
Halliday et al.	2020	Australia	Experimental	180 students in grade 9, aged between 13 and 16 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEPP may have had some buffering effect against the decline of mental health • Males appeared less likely to enjoy or benefit from the PEPP • Factors such as the subject of the intervention itself increased some participants' awareness of negative aspects and unintentionally caused some students to feel greater distress • Teacher efficacy was also one of the relevant factors that may impact PEPP
Vela et al.	2019	USA	Quasi-Experimental	67 Latina/o (24 males and 43 females) adolescents in two high schools in the southern United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants obtained significantly higher scores on resilience • participants report an increase in personal recovery attitudes. • participants report a decrease in depressive symptoms.

Lastly, a study by (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012) combines PPIs and creative journal arts (creating mandalas and masks). Participants in the treatment group that received seven sessions of positive

psychology and creative journal art could improve their ability to bounce back from adverse experiences that were seen from a higher resilience score than the control group. The positive psychology and creative journal art group also not only obtained a significant decrease in their depressive symptoms but also a higher recovery attitude toward the intervention which is a sense of confidence when faced with mental health struggles. There are some explanations on how combining PPIs and creative journal arts can improve bounce-back ability and decrease depressive symptoms: (a) gratitude, hope, and happiness in this intervention are related to resilience, grit, or persistence that could improve participant ability to bounce back from adversity; (b) identifying gratitude for participant's past, happiness about the present, and hope for the future can develop confidence that will be helpful when participants are faced with mental health struggles.

Based on the two previous studies, positive psychology intervention is not given alone but with other interventions as well. For instance, PPIs are given elaborated with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) (Teixeira & Freire, 2020). The elaboration between the two interventions is called OFTA, which was introduced to participants as a combination of PPIs and CBT to identify positive thoughts and problem-solving using character strengths (Teixeira & Freire, 2020). The authors believed that positive activities in the intervention could be used as a supplement to CBT to decrease the symptoms of depression and improve well-being as well (Teixeira & Freire, 2020). Furthermore, positive psychology intervention is also given with creative art journaling (Picazo-Vela et al., 2012).

The previous study adapted positive psychology and creative art journaling into a seven-session treatment program to help adolescents express emotions, identify gratitude, and develop hope for the future (Vela et al., 2019). Whereas the third study implemented the PEPP as a positive program in the education settings (Halliday et al., 2020). Studies from (Teixeira & Freire, 2020) and (Vela et al., 2019) show that positive psychology intervention is known to be effective to reduce depressive symptoms whereas (Halliday et al., 2020) study shows that PPI is known to be effective in buffering students from declining mental health because there is a little evidence of changes in student's well-being and resilience and proven to decrease depression symptoms only in group 2 which is PPIs given in the third term of school. In addition, positive psychology intervention is known to be effective in not only reducing depressive symptoms but also increasing well-being in adolescents; however, it prevails best when PPIs are incorporated with other therapies, such as CBT and art therapy. Further research should investigate how PPIs alone could decrease depressive symptoms without other kinds of therapy.

CONCLUSION

Our results seem to support the importance of PPIs in reducing depressive symptoms thus improving well-being and positive feeling. Based on the result of this article's review, PPIs combined with art therapy, CBT, and PEPP show promise as an effective treatment to increase well-being and reduce depressive symptoms. This review allows us to see the potential of PPI strategies to improve mental health and raise the need for studies to assess and measure the effectiveness of PPI. To date, the effectiveness of PPIs in adolescents' school-based settings and non-school-based settings are not been systematically evaluated. This meta-analysis addressed this gap by synthesizing the efficacy of PPIs on well-being and symptoms of depression in adolescents.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that this article has no conflict of interest

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