

RESEARCH ARTICLE

EMOTIONAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE EFFECTS OF SOMATIC THERAPY TECHNIQUES IN REDUCING DEPRESSION AMONG STUDENTS OF SKILL TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT - Depression among students of higher education institutions is an increasingly worrying issue, with negative effects on mental well-being and academic performance. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of somatic therapy techniques in reducing depression levels and improving students' emotional well-being. Somatic therapy focuses on the relationship between the body and emotions through movement, breathing, and body awareness techniques to reduce psychological stress. This study uses quantitative and qualitative approaches, involving a sample of students with mild to moderate depressive symptoms. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and behavioral observations before and after an eight-week somatic therapy intervention. The results of the study showed a significant decrease in participants' depression levels, increased emotional awareness, and increased ability to control stress. Somatic therapy was found to be an easy-to-practice and effective method in reducing depression. This study suggests that somatic therapy should be made part of mental health intervention strategies in higher technical education institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Mental health problems are a global problem. There is a continuous increase in these mental health issues. Among those who cannot be spared from these mental health issues are; adolescents. According to the World Health Organization 2024 Globally, about one in seven, or 14%, of adolescents aged 10 to 19 years old experience mental health problems, but most of them are unrecognized and untreated (World Health Organization, 2024). Depression among students in higher education institutions is increasingly worrying, especially due to academic, social, and financial pressures (Mahpis& Akhir, 2020). This ongoing pressure often negatively impacts students' mental health, which can affect academic performance and overall well-being (Halim, Rahman & Surat, (2024); Mahpis & Akhir, (2020); Zulkipli, (2023). Therefore, various approaches such as motivational, therapy using counselling have been studied by Halim et. Al (2024); to help address this issue, but no specific methods have been found that can be used to treat depression (Blum, 2015). Therapists must be more creative in developing treatments that suit the study group (Yusof, Nubli & Wahab, 2017). According Leseho & Maxwell, (2010); Puig et al. (2006); Rasingam (2011); Yusof et al. (2017), this movement or somatic technique can help study participants who are predominantly kinesthetic to undergo therapy. This therapy focuses on the relationship between the body and emotions by integrating movement techniques, breathing, and body awareness to reduce psychological stress (Leseho & Maxwell 2010); Halim et al. (2024). There has been no specific study that uses somatic studies on students at technical training institutes.

Previous study focusses somatic in medical field such as (Cusin & Dougherty (2012) Hinton, Safren, & Pollack (2006). This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of somatic therapy in reducing depression levels and improving the emotional well-being of students in higher education institutions. According to Marcher, Jarlnaes, & Dethlefsen (2007), somatic psychotherapy is helpful tools to help person with minimal word. Depressive factors cause inflammatory problems in adolescents and depression is also said to cause other problems such as sudden and unstable weight gain, this increase will contribute to other diseases that contribute to inflammation Faidah et al. (2021). Overall, this study describes the involvement of activities carried out by adolescents and their effects on somatic symptoms, depression, and cognitive symptoms. Adolescent behavior will contribute more to high somatic symptoms, after which it will influence cognitive symptoms and finally influence the stress felt by adolescents Faidah et al. (2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In understanding the effectiveness of somatic therapy, this study examines theories related to this therapy and its relationship to depression. Previous studies by Faidah et al. (2021); Riyanty & Nurendra (2021), have shown that somatic therapy can help individuals identify and release emotions trapped in the body, which are often a major contributor to depression. In addition, techniques such as controlled breathing, directed body movements, and body meditation have

been shown to help reduce symptoms of depression and increase individual emotional stability Faidah et al. (2021). Compared to traditional cognitive therapy that focuses more on rational thinking, somatic therapy provides a holistic approach that involves direct body-mind interaction Ma et al. (2021). The stress model suggests that adolescents who grow up without stress will go through adolescence smoothly without emotional stress and challenging behaviors. On the other hand, adolescents with risk characteristics will respond less adaptively to adolescence and will be influenced by the environment and environmental development that will contribute to and shape positive or negative situations Hankin et al. (2015). Previous studies that have examined the effectiveness of somatic psychotherapy techniques in overcoming stress include studies conducted by Courtois & Cools (2015); Fuchs & Fox (2009); Priebe et al. (2013); Spiegel (2014). This study examined the effects of somatic psychotherapy and its overall impact on depression faced by a person. This study found that the BOP technique was able to reduce depression experienced by cancer patients. Schizophrenia, phobias and fatigue by means of self-control through the somatic technique. Another factor associated with depression faced by adolescents is the boredom factor. Boredom is something that adolescents do not like to experience the most Spaeth, Weichold, & Silbereisen (2015). The boredom factor can be classified into several factors, including weak family relationships, rejection from peers, not being able to adapt well as, a long time in institutions and institutional environments whether in the city or the countryside. The effects of depression were also studied to contribute to the problem.Depression affects all elements of life including elements of the heart such as sadness and feelings of worthlessness, cognitive (difficulty concentrating, difficulty making decisions), and physiology, namely in terms of sleep time and lack of energy to do a task. During depression, there is a shift between autonomic balance and sympathetic dominance Caldwell & Steffen (2018).

Introduction to Somatic Therapy

Somatic therapy is a psychotherapy approach that emphasizes the relationship between mind and body in managing emotions and trauma. This approach combines techniques such as controlled breathing, body awareness, and movement to help individuals cope with psychological stress. A study by Levine (1997), emphasizes the importance of somatic interventions in releasing trauma stored in the body, which can contribute to emotional well-being.

The Connection between Somatic Therapy and Emotional Transformation

Several studies have shown that somatic techniques can aid in emotional transformation by reducing body tension associated with stress and depression. According to Van der Kolk (2014), experiences of trauma and stress can be stored in the body, and through somatic therapy, individuals are able to process difficult emotions and promote psychological recovery. According to Courtois & Cools (2015), sometimes clients find it difficult to express everything they feel in words. But they can compress with movement.

Somatic Therapy in Reducing Depression

Depression is often associated with dysfunctions in emotional regulation and imbalances in the autonomic nervous system. A study by Payne, Levine, & Crane-Godreau (2015), showed that somatic techniques such as movement and breathing therapy can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps calm individuals and reduce symptoms of depression. Additionally, another study by Mehling et al. (2011), found that body mindfulness training can improve psychological well-being by reducing depressive symptoms and increasing emotional resilience.

Effectiveness of Somatic Therapy Among Students of Skills Training Institutions

Students of skills training institutions often face academic pressures and challenges in building practical skills. A study by Van der Kolk (2021), shows that somatic therapy can help students who suffer from emotional distress by increasing body awareness and improving their coping mechanisms. Interventions such as therapeutic yoga, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques have been shown to have a positive effect in reducing depressive symptoms and improving psychological well-being. Somatic therapy offers an effective approach in dealing with depression by helping individuals access and process their emotions through the body. In the context of students of skills training institutions, these techniques can be an important tool in improving their emotional well-being and academic performance. Therefore, more studies and implementation of somatic therapy interventions need to be explored to ensure that their benefits can be widely utilized.

METODOLOGY

To test the effectiveness of somatic therapy among students of higher education institutions, this study used a quantitative approach. The study sample consisted of students experiencing mild to moderate depressive symptoms, who were selected through purposive sampling. Students were screened using the DASS inventory first, then students were asked to undergo an eight-week training module. A total of 40 participants were involved in the study. Data were collected using the Beck Depression Inventory questionnaire which was aligned with the module objectives. Data were collected twice, before and after the module, to see the effectiveness of the intervention. Findings analysis was tested using SPSS 29.0 software to see pre- and post-differences. Supporting data was obtained through semi-structured interviews to understand the participants' experiences, as well as observations of changes in their behavior and emotional expression throughout the study period.

FINDINGS

The study involved a total of 40 participants, comprising 32 males (80%) and 8 females (20%), as illustrated in Table 1. The majority of participants (67.5%, n=27) came from the B40 income group, which represents the bottom 40% of household income earners. Meanwhile, 20% (n=8) were from the M40 group (middle 40%), and the remaining 12.5% (n=5) belonged to the T20 group (top 20% income bracket). This demographic profile suggests that the intervention was particularly relevant for individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who may have limited access to mental health resources.

Table 1. Descriptive table of studies				
Category	Percentage (%)	Number (People)		
Men	80.0%	32 participants		
Woman	20.0%	8 participants		
B40	67.5%	27 participants		
M40	20.0%	8 participants		
T20	12.5%	5 participants		

Descriptive Statistics of Depression Scores

Descriptive analysis of the depression scores (Table 2) revealed a minimum score of 3.3, a mode of 3, a standard deviation of 1.32, and a variance of 1.75. These values indicate moderate variability in the participants' depression scores before the intervention, suggesting that while some individuals were more affected, there was a central tendency around the mode of 3.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics table				
Min	Min Mod		Variance	
3.3	3	1.32	1.75	

Effectiveness of Somatic Therapy (Paired Sample t-Test)

To evaluate the impact of the somatic therapy module, a paired sample t-test was conducted comparing pre- and postmodule depression scores. The analysis showed a statistically significant improvement in participants' mental health, with a mean difference of 0.65. The t-statistic was 8.51, and the p-value was less than 0.001, indicating a very significant reduction in depression levels following the intervention (Table 3). This suggests that the somatic therapy module had a strong effect on participants' emotional well-being.

Table 3. T-test schedule (pre vs post module)				
Min Difference	Df	T-Statistics	P value	
0.65	39	8.51	< 0.001 (very significant)	

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to explore any gender differences in depression outcomes following the intervention. The F-statistic was 0.51 with a p-value of 0.481, indicating that the difference in outcomes between male and female participants was not statistically significant (Table 4). This implies that the somatic therapy was equally effective across genders.

Table 4. Intersex ANOVA test schedule				
F-statistics	Dx	Df	P value	
0.51	1	38	0.481 (insignificant)	

The results showed that there was a significant decrease in participants' depression levels after undergoing somatic therapy. The t-value was < 0.001 and it showed there was a pre and post-module difference in depression. The mean difference is 0.65 i.e. the somatic module affects the change in technology by 65 %. While in terms of gender, there was no difference between the sexes to depression Most participants reported improvements in their emotional awareness, ability to control stress, as well as their overall well-being. Through qualitative data analysis, it was found that somatic therapy helped participants release physical tension associated with emotional stress, thus improving feelings of calm and balance in their daily lives. In addition, feedback from participants also showed that this therapy is easy to practice and can be adapted to individual needs.



Figure 1. Somatic intervention application and its relatedness to emotional transformation

Figure 1 illustrates the thematic connection between somatic intervention practices and emotional transformation as identified through qualitative analysis. On the left side, the diagram lists specific somatic techniques employed during the intervention, including structured breathing, body awareness, stretching and simple movements, grounding techniques, and progressive muscle relaxation. These elements collectively form the core of the Somatic Application. The right side of the diagram represents the emotional outcomes reported by participants as a result of engaging in these practices. These include increased emotional awareness, improved ability to control stress, heightened motivation and enjoyment, and enhanced self-confidence and overall satisfaction. The directional arrow signifies a causal or influential relationship, highlighting how the application of somatic techniques contributed to positive emotional shifts in participants. This visual captures the core qualitative finding — that somatic methods can foster meaningful emotional transformation, promoting well-being and psychological resilience.

Application of Somatic Psychotherapy Techniques and Their Impact on Emotional Transformation

The qualitative findings from participant feedback provide strong support for the effectiveness of somatic psychotherapy techniques in fostering emotional awareness, stress regulation, and psychological well-being. Each technique applied in the intervention was found to contribute uniquely to participants' emotional transformation. Below is a detailed description of each technique along with illustrative participant experiences.

Structured Breathing

This technique involved teaching participants how to regulate their breathing to help calm the autonomic nervous system, especially in moments of anxiety. Through guided deep breathing participant do the slow inhalation and exhalation. participants were able to develop a sense of control and calmness.

One participant (P2) shared:

"Bila saya rasa cemas, saya cuba tarik nafas dalam-dalam dan hembus perlahan-lahan. Ia sangat membantu."

("When I feel anxious, I try to take a deep breath and exhale slowly. It really helps.")

This highlights how structured breathing became a self-regulation tool during moments of emotional distress.

Body Awareness

The body awareness exercise aimed to help participants tune into their bodily sensations, especially those linked to emotional states like anxiety or calm. Participants learned to recognize the early signs of stress within their bodies, thus allowing earlier intervention or self-soothing.

Participant P6 stated:

"Saya perasan bila saya mula panik, jantung saya berdegup kencang. Sekarang saya lebih peka dan boleh cuba bertenang."

("I noticed that when I start to panic, my heart beats fast. Now I'm more aware and can try to calm myself down.")

This suggests that body awareness facilitated emotional literacy through the recognition of physical cues tied to inner feelings.

Stretching and Simple Movements

Gentle physical movements and stretching were used as a strategy to release built-up emotional tension in the body. The act of moving helped participants feel physically and emotionally lighter.

Participant P5 explained:

"Saya akan bangun dan buat sedikit pergerakan bila rasa tertekan supaya badan saya tidak terlalu tegang."

("I will stand up and do a bit of movement when I feel stressed, so my body doesn't get too tense.")

This feedback reflects the power of physical activity to promote emotional release and relaxation, especially during periods of psychological pressure.

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques such as pressing the feet to the floor or holding an object were introduced to enhance participants' sense of presence in the current moment. These practices proved effective in redirecting attention away from stress or overwhelming thoughts.

Participant P4 reported:

"Saya genggam objek kecil untuk ingatkan diri supaya fokus pada masa sekarang, bukan tekanan yang saya rasa."

("I hold a small object to remind myself to focus on the present moment, not the pressure I'm feeling.")

Such practices support mindfulness and cognitive reorientation, helping participants stay anchored during difficult emotions.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This technique guided participants to systematically tense and release different muscle groups while combining it with slow breathing. It promoted physical relaxation and significantly reduced stress.

Participant P7 shared:

"Saya cuba pejam mata dan relaks sedikit demi sedikit setiap otot badan saya. Ia buat saya rasa lebih tenang."

("I try to close my eyes and relax each muscle in my body bit by bit. It makes me feel calmer.")

This method encouraged deep physical and emotional relaxation, enabling participants to slow down their stress responses.

The relationship between the application of this somatic psychotherapy technique and this emotional transformation is plotted in the matrix structure below.

Main Theme/ Study Participants	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Emotional Changes and somatic applications	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Increased emotional awareness		/		/	/		
Increased ability to control stress	/	/		/		/	
Increase Uncertainty & Reduce Anxiety			/	/	/		/
Fun & Motivation	/	/		/		/	
Confidence and self-satisfaction					/	/	/

Table 5. Matrix structure Somatic applications and emotional transformation

Based on the matrix of the relationship structure between somatic techniques and emotional transformation, it was found that all the interviewed participants could feel emotional transformation but through different understandings. P1-P7 felt that there was an emotional change after going through somatic intervention. Increased emotions were felt by P2, P4 and P5. Increased pressure control ability is felt by P1, P2, P4 and P6. Participants noted that the somatic techniques carried out were able to increase uncertainty and anxiety. The participants who stated this were P3, P4, P5 and P7. For the nervousness and motivation felt by P1, P2, P4 and P6. And for confidence and self-satisfaction felt by P5, P6 and P7.

The qualitative findings of the study demonstrate that the application of somatic psychotherapy techniques significantly contributed to participants' emotional transformation. Techniques such as structured breathing, body awareness, stretching and simple movements, grounding, and progressive muscle relaxation helped participants manage emotional stress more effectively. Participants reported increased awareness of bodily signals linked to stress, enabling them to respond with appropriate calming strategies. They also expressed improvements in emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and enhanced overall well-being. For instance, breathing techniques were found to induce calm during anxiety, while grounding practices helped participants stay focused in the present moment. These interventions not only reduced physical tension but also fostered greater self-confidence, motivation, and emotional stability. Overall, the somatic practices supported a deeper connection between body and emotion, empowering participants to take active roles in managing their emotional health.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Emotional transformation is an important aspect of understanding the effectiveness of somatic therapy in dealing with depression. Based on the findings of this study, the emotional changes experienced by participants showed an

improvement in their ability to recognize, understand, and control emotions more effectively. Prior to undergoing somatic therapy, most participants reported that they often experienced stress that led to feelings of hopelessness, emotional exhaustion, as well as a lack of control over their reactions to daily stress. However, after the intervention, participants reported improvements in body and emotional awareness, allowing them to better manage negative feelings. Somatic therapy plays an important role in encouraging individuals to reconnect with their bodies, further allowing them to release trapped emotions and reduce the physical strain often associated with depression. This emotional transformation not only helps in reducing the symptoms of depression, but also increases students' self-confidence and psychological resilience in facing academic challenges as well as daily life. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies by Warner et al., (2014): Yusof et al., (2017). Even in a study that examined the training requirements required by technical stream learners by Yusof et al., (2022), it was supported that These techniques can support the transformation and regulation of students' emotions. The implications of this study are important in providing alternative interventions to address depression among students of higher education institutions. Taking into account the growing needs of students in facing academic and personal life challenges, somatic therapy can be made part of the mental health programs offered at higher education institutions.

Emotional transformation studied through qualitative data found that study participants were able to transform their negative emotions into positive emotions through the application of somatic techniques. They stated there was an increase in emotional awareness, an increase in the ability to control stress, increase uncertainty and reduce anxiety, increase pleasure and motivation, and increase motivation and self-satisfaction. Researchers found that the transformation process of emotional change will go through several steps such as starting with uncertainty, then adapting and motivation in understanding the emotions felt and using emotions to build motivation until they are able to build confidence and emotional satisfaction.

Phase 1: Uncertainty \rightarrow **Phase 2**: Adjustment & Motivation \rightarrow **Phase 3**: Confidence & Satisfaction

The element of emotional uncertainty occurs at the beginning of the session where the study participants are unable to identify what is the main cause of the misunderstanding. The next phase is the adaptation of study participants to new changes after the intervention and finally the stage of building confidence and self-satisfaction after therapy.

However, the study also had some limitations, such as small sample sizes and limited intervention duration. Therefore, further studies with larger sample sizes and longer intervention periods are needed to confirm the effectiveness of this therapy in more depth. Overall, this study proves that somatic therapy is an effective approach in helping to reduce the level of depression as well as improve the emotional well-being of students of higher education institutions. This therapy not only aids in stress management, but also provides students with effective tools to manage their emotions more proactively. Therefore, somatic therapy should be considered as part of intervention strategies in mental health programs in higher technical education institutions to support the overall psychological well-being of students.

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