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Teuku Fadhli & Dominikus David Biondi Situmorang

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# The implementation of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SBFT) as a solution for handling psychological anxiety in facing the COVID-19 outbreak

Teuku Fadhli<sup>a</sup> and Dominikus David Biondi Situmorang<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Guidance and Counseling, Jabal Ghafur University, Sigli, Aceh, Indonesia;

<sup>b</sup>Department of Guidance and Counseling, Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia, DKI Jakarta, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

This study explained the importance of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SBFT) approach in dealing with individuals to find solutions both after and during the occurrence of psychological anxiety, the application of SBFT can be done practically, effectively, and efficiently. This study uses comparative analysis, which refers to various relevant literature between SBFT and psychological anxiety, especially in COVID-19 outbreak in the form of scientific journal articles, reference books, and other information from trusted sources. The results revealed that there is a significant correlation between theories, both basic assumptions and concepts related to the SBFT intervention process in an effort to help individuals find solutions to problems that are or will be experienced. This study can then be a scientific reference for the application of the SBFT approach as an effort to improve the ability to find solutions.

## ABSTRAKT

Diese Studie erläuterte die Bedeutung des Ansatzes der lösungsorientierten Kurzzeittherapie (SBFT) im Umgang mit Einzelpersonen, um Lösungen sowohl nach als auch während des Auftretens von psychischer Angst zu finden. Die Anwendung von SBFT kann praktisch, effektiv und effizient erfolgen. Diese Studie verwendet eine vergleichende Analyse, die sich auf verschiedene relevante Literatur zwischen SBFT und psychischer Angst bezieht, insbesondere zum COVID-19-Ausbruch in Form von Artikeln in wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften, Nachschlagewerken und anderen Informationen aus vertrauenswürdigen Quellen. Die Ergebnisse zeigten, dass es eine signifikante Korrelation zwischen Theorien, sowohl Grundannahmen als auch Konzepten im Zusammenhang mit dem SBFT-Interventionsprozess gibt, um Einzelpersonen dabei zu helfen, Lösungen für Probleme zu finden, die auftreten oder auftreten werden. Diese Studie kann dann als wissenschaftliche Referenz für die Anwendung des SBFT-Ansatzes zur Verbesserung der Lösungsfähigkeit dienen.

**RESUMEN**

Este estudio explicó la importancia del enfoque de la Terapia Breve Centrada en Soluciones (SBFT) en el trato con las personas para encontrar soluciones tanto después como durante la ocurrencia de la ansiedad psicológica, la aplicación de SBFT se puede hacer de manera práctica, efectiva y eficiente. Este estudio utiliza un análisis comparativo, que se refiere a varias publicaciones relevantes entre SBFT y la ansiedad psicológica, especialmente en el brote de COVID-19 en forma de artículos de revistas científicas, libros de referencia y otra información de fuentes confiables. Los resultados revelaron que existe una correlación significativa entre las teorías, tanto los supuestos básicos como los conceptos relacionados con el proceso de intervención de SBFT en un esfuerzo por ayudar a las personas a encontrar soluciones a los problemas que experimentan o experimentarán. Este estudio puede entonces ser una referencia científica para la aplicación del enfoque SBFT como un esfuerzo para mejorar la capacidad de encontrar soluciones.

**RIASSUNTO**

Questo studio ha spiegato l'importanza dell'approccio Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SBFT) nel trattare con gli individui per trovare soluzioni sia dopo che durante il verificarsi di ansia psicologica, l'applicazione di SBFT può essere eseguita in modo pratico, efficace ed efficiente. Questo studio utilizza l'analisi comparativa, che fa riferimento a varie pubblicazioni rilevanti tra SBFT e ansia psicologica, in particolare nell'epidemia di COVID-19 sotto forma di articoli di riviste scientifiche, libri di consultazione e altre informazioni da fonti attendibili. I risultati hanno rivelato che esiste una correlazione significativa tra le teorie, sia i presupposti di base che i concetti relativi al processo di intervento SBFT nel tentativo di aiutare le persone a trovare soluzioni ai problemi che sono o saranno vissuti. Questo studio può quindi essere un riferimento scientifico per l'applicazione dell'approccio SBFT come sforzo per migliorare la capacità di trovare soluzioni.

**ABSTRAIT**

Cette étude a expliqué l'importance de l'approche de la thérapie brève axée sur les solutions (SBFT) dans le traitement des individus pour trouver des solutions à la fois après et pendant l'apparition de l'anxiété psychologique, l'application de la SBFT peut être effectuée de manière pratique, efficace et efficiente. Cette étude utilise une analyse comparative, qui fait référence à diverses publications pertinentes entre SBFT et l'anxiété psychologique, en particulier dans l'épidémie de COVID-19 sous la forme d'articles de revues scientifiques, d'ouvrages de référence et d'autres informations provenant de sources fiables. Les résultats ont révélé qu'il existe une corrélation significative entre les théories, les hypothèses de base et les concepts liés au processus d'intervention SBFT dans le but d'aider les individus à trouver des solutions aux problèmes qui sont ou seront vécus. Cette étude peut alors constituer une référence scientifique pour l'application de l'approche SBFT dans le but d'améliorer la capacité à trouver des solutions.

**ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ**

Αυτή η μελέτη εξήγησε τη σημασία της προσέγγισης της συνοπτικής θεραπείας με επίκεντρο τη λύση (SFBT) στην αντιμετώπιση ατόμων για την εξεύρεση λύσεων τόσο μετά όσο και κατά τη διάρκεια της εμφάνισης ψυχολογικού άγχους, η εφαρμογή της SBFT μπορεί να γίνει πρακτικά, αποτελεσματικά και αποδοτικά. Αυτή η μελέτη χρησιμοποιεί συγκριτική ανάλυση, η οποία αναφέρεται σε ποικίλη σχετική βιβλιογραφία μεταξύ του SFBT και του ψυχολογικού άγχους, ειδικά στην επιδημία COVID-19 με τη μορφή άρθρων επιστημονικών περιοδικών, βιβλίων αναφοράς και άλλων πληροφοριών από αξιόπιστες πηγές. Τα αποτελέσματα αποκάλυψαν ότι υπάρχει σημαντική συσχέτιση μεταξύ των θεωριών, τόσο βασικών υποθέσεων όσο και εννοιών που σχετίζονται με τη διαδικασία παρέμβασης SFBT σε μια προσπάθεια να βοηθηθούν τα άτομα να βρουν λύσεις σε προβλήματα που έχουν ή θα βιώσουν. Αυτή η μελέτη μπορεί στη συνέχεια να αποτελέσει μια επιστημονική αναφορά για την εφαρμογή της προσέγγισης SFBT ως μια προσπάθεια βελτίωσης της ικανότητας εύρεσης λύσεων.

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**KEYWORDS** Solution-Focused brief therapy; SFBT; psychological anxiety; COVID-19 outbreak

**SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER** lösungsorientierte Kurzzeittherapie; sfbt; psychologische Angst; Covid-19 Ausbruch

**PALABRAS CLAVE** terapia breve centrada en soluciones; sfbt; ansiedad psicológica; Brote de COVID-19

**PAROLE CHIAVE** terapia breve incentrata sulla soluzione; sfbt; ansia psicologica; Epidemia di covid-19

**MOTS-CLÉS** thérapie brève axée sur les solutions ; sfbt; anxiété psychologique; Épidémie de covid-19

**ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ** θεραπεία με επίκεντρο τη λύση; sfbt; ψυχολογικό άγχος; Εξαρση του covid-19

## Introduction

COVID-19 is a new virus that spreads quickly, so it is not very comforting for human life. As a result, psychological disorders also appear in some individuals worldwide, leading to excessive anxiety disorders in humans themselves (Situmorang et al., 2021; Situmorang, 2021a). The COVID-19 pandemic has formed a behavior and mentality that tends to be alone. In other words, COVID-19 has included extreme psychological anxiety in individuals who then form new habits of interaction (Zheng et al., 2020). To reduce the number of virus transmission, the government is doing everything possible through health protocols that implement a distancing system, namely social distancing (Situmorang, 2020a). Social distancing leads individuals to reduce the number of social contacts made in response to avoiding disease, which is a form of personal health protection behavior (Williams et al., 2015).

Taylor et al. (2020) stated that the impact on psychological health due to COVID-19 is more substantial than the impact on medical health, because the number of people who are emotionally affected by COVID-19 is very

large and they need immediate help. Stuart (2013) stated that psychological anxiety is a condition of emotional stability or uncertain feelings experienced by individuals. A person's psychological anxiety also varies; psychological anxiety often occurs based on any stimulus that is an excessive response to something (Situmorang, 2021b). COVID-19 is a new individual experience that can trigger anxiety. New experiences can trigger psychological anxiety such as the status of new parents, new jobs, new responsibilities, and physical or viral or illness (Situmorang, 2020b; Stuart, 2013).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's behavior, especially social behavior due to social restrictions by the government, causing excessive personal-social anxiety. Johnson et al. (2008) and Venkatesh and Edirappuli (2020) said that anxiety is a complication of several negative emotions caused by excessive fear. For example, in an event, someone feels afraid, sad, and angry, which can be interpreted as 'worried' by the individual who feels it: another example, feelings of shame and guilt that come with emotion. From a psychoanalytic perspective, anxiety is a feeling of fear caused by repressing feelings, memories, desires, and experiences that appear in one's consciousness (Corey, 2012; Shanafelt et al., 2020). Anxiety sensitivity is interpreted as an incorrect response to the signs displayed by the body that cause anxiety (Taylor et al., 2007).

The aim and center of attention in this study are to review the literature in previous studies that lead to handling psychological anxiety in facing the COVID-19 outbreak with the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) approach. A comparative analysis is prioritized as an essential foundation for literature research. Besides, it can provide benefits to further researchers. In this study, the authors examined the level of significance and achievement that focused on applying SFBT in the practical handling of human psychological problems such as anxiety that occurs due to the past and what is happening.

Psychological anxiety is formed by the social environment such as the family environment; society, social anxiety arises from environmental pressures that impact unproductive behavior. Excessive anxiety can be categorized as a mental disorder (Hofmann et al., 2010). Another study explained that the SFBT approach with *thought stopping* techniques effectively deals with personal anxiety due to the past and those being faced (Fadhli & Siregar, 2020). Also, Taathadi (2014) added that the SFBT approach could produce therapeutic changes in increasing the self-esteem of high school students.

Individuals who experience acute anxiety need serious and special treatment to form new cognitions from unproductive thoughts to become more productive. Anxiety will make individuals stay away from social activities or talking to others because they are afraid of something that leads to themselves (Epkins & Heckler, 2011; Moghanibashi-Mansourieh, 2020; Nanjundaswamy et al., 2020). Anxiety can result in a person being

unproductive and experiencing psychological stress. Management of psychological anxiety can be done with the SFBT approach (de Shazer et al., 2007; Gingerich & Peterson, 2013). The SFBT approach is one of the psychotherapy approaches that are practical, effective, and efficient to anticipate the increasing psychological anxiety experienced by individuals. Amalia (2017), in her dissertation research using repeated measures, showed that the SFBT group counseling was effective in increasing self-esteem.

SFBT is a counseling approach based on the view that truth and reality are not absolute ones, but reality and truth can be constructed (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000). Franklin et al. (2001) stated that SFBT is effectively applied to children in the school environment. The results showed that the students showed positive changes in various behavioral problems and learning difficulties. The research question in this study: 'How is the implementation of SFBT as a solution for handling psychological anxiety in the COVID-19 outbreak?'

## Methods

In this study, the authors used the literature comparative analysis method, in which the authors examined various literature specific to the context of research in the psychological realm. The literature is scientific journal articles, reference books, and other information from credible sources. In this analysis, the authors analyzed various data-oriented towards disaster management with a solution insight to know mental disorders, such as anxiety, social disorders, and traumatic disorders during COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the authors reviewed various literature on psychological treatment using the SFBT approach in this study.

## Results and discussion

In existential theory, it is seen as an active stimulation for thinking. Psychological anxiety due to COVID-19 can affect cognition. It can shape human behavior in it, and this is a condition where a person's ability to respond to their environment, which in turn leads a person to feel anxious about something that will happen (Banga, 2014). In 2015, WHO released that mental crises and disorders were the sixth top case with a proportion of 3.4% of people experiencing them (World Health Organization, 2017).

COVID-19 case is an issue that occurs outside human logic and dramatically affects the psychological aspects of humans, which lead to the demand for separate ways of thinking that can arise and excessive anxiety; this anxiety also causes human character and behavior that should not occur, due to by awareness of responsibility towards oneself (Bujang et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015; Olivera-La Rosa et al., 2020). Like isolating

yourself from the environment to avoid transmission of COVID-19. Because COVID-19 can threaten human safety. Anxiety will make individuals stay away from social activities or talk to others because they are afraid of something that leads to themselves. Anxiety can result in a person being unproductive and experiencing psychological stress (Kumar & Somani, 2020; Shamsuddin et al., 2013; Situmorang & Salim, 2021). The American Anxiety and Depression Association also shows that disorder affects 40 million adults in the United States at the age of 18 or over 18% of the population (Anxiety and Depression Association of America [ADAA] 2021).

Psychological anxiety is synonymous with thoughts that control thoughts; anxiety, fear is called psychology, which ultimately results in maladaptive behavior (Situmorang, 2018). These conditions indicate the importance of SFBT aimed at controlling negative responses such as discomfort. SFBT is a type of psychotherapy that emphasizes the ability to approach how to find solutions (Farrington et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2009). According to Corey et al. (2013), the COVID-19 approach can be a reference for ideas about the process of behavior change. Other studies have shown that 1/3 of participants experience psychological disorders, which are no different from men and women during the COVID-19 outbreak, in contrast to previous studies, which reveal that women are more likely than men (Gao et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2016).

As individual problems arise from various psychological issues, it is essential to take counseling or therapeutic therapy to overcome them (Ifeyanyi et al., 2015; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003). The goal is to stimulate unwanted thoughts by the counselee and negative thoughts about the conditions felt by the counselee at this time (Cooper & Law, 2018; Tjeltveit, 2006). In this study, the authors reveal other research facts that state that the SFBT approach effectively deals with human psychological problems based on practical solutions, such as psychology due to COVID-19.

As Farrington et al. (2011) in their study proves that the use of SFBT has been shown to improve math task completion, with participants showing an immediate improvement in task completion. SFBT is an approach that illustrates that a practical and effective solution can be constructed by the counselee (Jones et al., 2009). Another opinion states that SFBT is a therapeutic approach that emphasizes issues by finding solutions quickly and precisely in overcoming existing problems (Bannink, 2007). SFBT produces positive behavior changes for students experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties (Franklin & Streeter, 2003). Burns (in Farrington et al., 2011) explained that individuals should not be entangled in problems, but they should focus on solutions, act, and realize the desired solutions. The SFBT above indicates the importance of counseling that focuses on changing

the counselee's way of behaving, thinking, or perceptions with practical solutions so that counter-productive thoughts can be turned into positive reviews (Kurniawan & Mulia, 2018; O'Connell, 2012).

When counselees have positive thoughts, it is hoped that they will be more adaptive and productive in dealing with any events that occur. The application of SFBT in schools has developed over the last ten years and continues to be an exciting study for researchers, such as social worker schools and other school-based professionals (Franklin et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2008; Rhodes, 1993). Further research, such as Ibay and Akin (2014), states that group counseling focuses on solutions effectively in university students with burnout cases at university. This is in line with Joker and Ghaderi (2015), showing that solution-based group counseling can increase students' self-esteem and self-perception.

Franklin et al. (2008) in a study of the Effectiveness of SFBT in a school setting with children who have inter-class behavior problems in a school environment. This study applied five to seven sessions of short solution-focused therapy services given to 67 children. The findings support that SFBT is effective in correcting individual internal and external behavioral problems. However, other studies state there are limitations to the effectiveness of SFBT. Anxiety is a problem that is susceptible to almost everyone at certain times in their life span (Fadhli & Situmorang, 2021). de Shazer (in Taylor et al., 2017) argues that it is not so important to know the cause of a problem to solve.

### **Assumption of solution focused brief therapy approach**

SFBT assumes that humans are healthy, competent, and can build or construct orientations and solutions so that the individual is constantly engaged in developing problems (Situmorang, 2021c). According to Bandura, the importance is to emphasize healthy psychological development. To overcome harmful behavior in various cases, it is always important to take practical action that is effective and efficient in therapy or counseling to reduce ongoing reports (Melhim, 2015). According to Stuart (2013) anxiety is an unstable emotional condition or uncertain feeling that an individual presents. Anxiety can be in the form of a response to certain threatening situations and is customary when experiencing changes, new experiences, and determining one's identity and meaning in life. Normal anxiety is beneficial for responding to certain threatening situations (Kaplan et al., 2011). According to Huberty (2012), it can be expected if the level is not excessive, but it can become a severe problem if it is severe.

The SFBT approach makes a significant contribution to the counselee in overcoming social personal problems, such as Franklin et al. (2012) in their research that the SFBT approach is one type of psychopathology counseling or psychotherapy that emphasizes the ability to find solutions, this therapy



can be used to help counselees change their thinking processes (Bannink, 2007). SFBT is an approach that emphasizes practical, effective, and efficient solutions to counselees (Situmorang, 2021c).

## Conclusion

From the writing above, it can be concluded that based on literacy studies, SBFT has made positive contributions to multiple studies that lead to individual psychological problems. The literature study results show that SFBT is a practical, effective, and efficient approach for individuals who experience psychological events. The understanding above implies the importance of a therapeutic solution to changing the thinking or perception of counselees who think to be more productive, dynamic, and flexible in their ineffective daily activities. When the counselee has psychological problems, the counselee is expected to be more adaptive and effective in dealing with any events, especially in COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, there are significant clues between basic assumptions, goals or orientations, and SBFT principles in various psychological disorders. This correlation is a solid and relevant reference for future researchers.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Teuku Fadhli* is a lecturer in the Department of Guidance and Counseling at the Faculty of Education, Jabal Ghafur University. He is an outstanding lecturer in academics, active in various national and international seminars. He has conducted Counseling Psychology studies such as studies on Mental Health, Social Humanities, and Education, and play an active role in various non-governmental organizations in order to assist victims of violence against women and children. He is also the founder of the Counseling Center in Sigli City, Pidie Regency. In addition, he still plays an active role in conducting psycho-counseling in several correctional institutions including the Mental Hospital in Aceh Province.

*Dominikus David Biondi Situmorang* is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Guidance and Counseling at Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia. He is a 3rd Vice Dean or Head of Student Affairs, Alumni, and Cooperation in the Faculty of Education and Language. He was a Founder and a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Creative Counseling Center, Indonesia. He is a member of the Asosiasi Bimbingan dan Konseling Indonesia (ABKIN). He is the first and only Indonesian to serve on the Advisory Board of Elsevier's Reputable International Journal (Scopus Q1), *Heliyon - Psychology*. He is also an Editorial Board/Reviewer for many reputable scientific International and National Journals, especially in the Counseling, Psychology, Education, and Social Science fields. He is an inventor of "Rapid

Counseling/Psychotherapy” theory with Single-Session Music Therapy. He received two awards from the Indonesian World-Records Museum (MURI) as the composer of the song “Doa bagi Bangsa” and “The First Indonesian whose Article has been Published in the Palliative & Supportive Care - Cambridge University Press (Rapid Tele-Psychotherapy)”. In addition, he is also a Musician, a Singer-Songwriter, a #raxelquotes Author, an Ex-Seminarian, a Music Counselor, a Motivator, a Trainer, and an Influencer who has many achievements.

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