

## THE EFFECT OF VIRTUAL THERAPY ON ANXIETY DISORDERS IN ADOLESCENTS (Case Study of Adolescents in Malang City)

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### Abstract

Objective study This is For The influence of virtual therapy on anxiety disorders in adolescents . Method used in study This is method study qualitative as for type research used studies case, usage studies case because researcher can understand in a way deep context, process, and complexity moderate phenomenon studied while the research location was Malang City . Results study this explain that virtual therapy has an effect in reducing the level of anxiety among teenagers in Malang City. Virtual therapy allows teens to remain in a space they consider safe, such as their bedroom, which can increase their openness and comfort in undergoing the therapeutic process. The results of these field findings provide information that reducing the level of anxiety among teenagers in Malang City requires collaboration between various parties, including educational institutions, government and society.

**Keywords:** Virtual therapy, anxiety, teenagers

### Abstrak

*Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk pengaruh terapi virtual terhadap gangguan kecemasan pada remaja. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode penelitian kualitatif adapun jenis penelitian yang digunakan yakni studi kasus, penggunaan studi kasus dikarenakan peneliti dapat memahami secara mendalam konteks, proses, dan kompleksitas fenomena yang sedang diteliti sedangkan lokasi penelitian yakni di Kota Malang. Hasil penelitian ini menjelaskan bahwa terapi virtual berpengaruh dalam mengurangi tingkat kecemasan remaja di Kota Malang. Terapi virtual memungkinkan remaja untuk tetap berada di ruang yang mereka anggap aman, seperti kamar, yang dapat meningkatkan keterbukaan dan kenyamanan mereka dalam menjalani proses terapeutik. Hasil temuan lapangan tersebut memberikan informasi bahwa dalam mengurangi tingkat kecemasan remaja di Kota Malang perlu kolaborasi berbagai pihak baik lembaga pendidikan, pemerintah dan masyarakat.*

**Kata kunci:** Terapi virtual, kecemasan, remaja

## INTRODUCTION

The success of a nation's development cannot only be measured from economic and technological aspects, but is also determined by the welfare of its people. One important indicator of community welfare is mental health, especially among teenagers. Teenagers are an age group that is very vulnerable to mental health problems, one of which is anxiety. Anxiety in teenagers can have a serious impact on their psychological, social and academic development. Therefore, research on anxiety in adolescents is very important to understand its impact and develop effective intervention strategies (Fakhriyani et al., 2021).

According to Aprilia et al., (2020) Adolescence is a transition phase that is full of challenges in a person's life. The process of searching for identity, academic pressure, hormonal changes, and increasingly complex social interactions are factors that can trigger anxiety in teenagers. Furthermore, Agustina, (2022) explains that anxiety in adolescents does not only include concerns about academic achievement, but also involves concerns regarding social relationships, physical appearance and the future. This condition can impact a teenager's emotional well-being, and if not treated properly, can trigger more serious mental health problems.

Statistical data shows that anxiety in teenagers has increased in recent years. Adolescent health surveys show that a large number of adolescents report high levels of anxiety, with impacts that can affect various aspects of their daily lives. This creates an urgent need to understand the factors that contribute to anxiety in adolescents, both from a biological, psychological and environmental perspective (Andry B, 2023; Hasina et al., 2022; Sulistyorini et al., 2021).

Anxiety in teenagers not only impacts psychological aspects, but can also affect their physical health. The results of Hastuti & Arumsari, (2015) Research has shown that teenagers who experience high levels of anxiety tend to have a higher risk of various health problems, such as sleep disorders, eating disorders, and decreased immune system. Apart from that, anxiety can also affect the quality of teenagers' social relationships, both with peers and family.

Even though there has been a lot of research conducted on anxiety in adolescents, there are still limitations in the existing literature. Some studies tend to focus on certain aspects, such as psychological or environmental factors, without integrating all factors that may contribute to adolescent anxiety. Therefore, there is a need for more holistic and comprehensive research to understand the dynamics of anxiety in adolescents as a whole.

Based on the results of research that has been conducted, the level of anxiety disorders among teenagers in Malang City is quite high. Based on research conducted by Brawijaya University in 2019, it was found that 32.5% of high school teenagers in Malang City experienced mild depression, 28.2% experienced moderate depression, and 11.1% experienced severe depression. This shows that around 71.8% of high school teenagers in Malang City experience mental health disorders, most of which are anxiety disorders (Hidayati et al., 2021). Meanwhile, other research conducted by the University of Muhammadiyah Malang in 2021, found that 48% of junior high school teenagers in Malang City experienced mild anxiety, 46% experienced minimal anxiety, 4% experienced moderate anxiety, and 2%

experienced severe anxiety. This shows that around 96% of junior high school teenagers in Malang City experience anxiety disorders, most of which are mild and minimal anxiety (Jenny, 2022) .

From these two studies, it can be concluded that the level of anxiety disorders among teenagers in Malang City is quite high. This can be caused by various factors, including:

- Physical and hormonal changes that occur during adolescence can cause emotional instability and cause feelings of anxiety.
- Academic and social pressure experienced by teenagers can also be a factor causing anxiety.
- Experiences of trauma or stress experienced by teenagers can also increase the risk of anxiety disorders.

Anxiety disorders in teenagers can have a negative impact on various aspects of their lives, including:

- Learning disorders
- Disruption of social relationships
- Sleep disorder
- Behavioral disorders
- Increased risk of suicide

Therefore, it is important for teenagers to recognize the symptoms of anxiety disorders and seek professional help if necessary. Symptoms of anxiety disorders in teenagers according to Juhaeriah, (2021) include:

- Feelings of excessive anxiety, restlessness, or tension
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hard to sleep
- Easy to get angry
- Feel tired
- Easily offended
- Feeling afraid or worrying excessively

Currently, the world is entering the digital era and has brought fundamental changes in various aspects of life, including in the field of mental health. Virtual therapy, also known as online therapy or online therapy, is becoming one of the prominent innovations in providing mental health services. With increasing access to digital technology, virtual therapy is becoming an increasingly relevant option, especially in providing mental health services for individuals who find it difficult to access conventional therapy or experience geographic, time or mental health-related stigma (Meditania et al., 2020; Sjaefarhan & Urbayatun, 2022) .

Mental health is an important aspect of the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), every year, around 1 in 4 individuals worldwide experience mental health disorders. Unfortunately, many challenges remain regarding accessibility, availability of services, and the stigma that accompanies mental health care. In this context, virtual therapy emerges as a promising alternative to overcome some of these obstacles (Junita et al., 2023; Marzuki, 2023; Rusyda et al., 2021) .

The development of information and communication technology has opened up new opportunities in the provision of mental health services. Virtual therapy provides a platform where clients can interact with mental health professionals online via video calls, text messages, or other digital communication platforms. This allows for a connection between client and therapist without the need for a physical face-to-face meeting, thereby overcoming some geographic barriers and allowing access to a wider range of mental health services.

The advantages of Virtual Therapy according to Nur Ainia, (2020) include:

- **Accessibility and Availability:** Virtual therapy allows individuals to access mental health services without needing to travel long distances or encounter geographic barriers. This is critical in improving the accessibility of mental health services, especially for those who live in remote areas or do not have easy access to health facilities.
- **Stigma Reduction:** For some individuals, especially those experiencing mental health disorders, stigma remains a major barrier to seeking help. Virtual therapy allows individuals to access treatment in a more private and anonymous manner, helping to reduce the stigma associated with traditional counseling or therapy.
- **Time Flexibility:** Virtual therapy provides greater time flexibility for clients and therapists. Clients can schedule sessions according to their convenience, even outside conventional business hours. This helps fit treatment into busy daily schedules, allowing more people to receive mental health services without sacrificing productive time.
- **Providing Services in Times of Crisis:** Virtual therapy also has an important role in providing mental health services in times of crisis, such as natural disasters or pandemics. The ability to stay connected with a therapist online becomes critical when physical meetings become difficult or unsafe.

According to Wardah et al., (2021) Although virtual therapy offers a number of advantages, there are also a number of challenges that need to be overcome to maximize its potential:

1. **Security and Privacy:** Data security and client privacy are critical aspects of virtual therapy. The availability of capable technology to protect personal data and client discussions is an important aspect in ensuring that virtual therapy is reliable.
2. **Therapeutic Relationship:** Virtual therapy may be challenging in building a strong therapeutic relationship between client and therapist. Missing nonverbal cues in virtual interactions can affect the quality of the relationship.
3. **Technology Accessibility:** Although technology is improving, not everyone has easy access or enough knowledge to use virtual therapy platforms. This can create gaps in accessibility.
4. **Regulations and Standards:** There is a need for regulations and standards to ensure that virtual therapy is delivered with high ethics and quality. A balance between technological flexibility and patient safety is key in establishing an effective regulatory framework.

Based on the explanation above, researchers are interested in conducting research with the title the effect of virtual therapy on anxiety disorders in adolescents (Case study of adolescents in Malang City).

## **METHOD**

This research uses qualitative research, according to Murdiyanto , (2020) Method study qualitative focused on understanding depth , interpretation , and disclosure meaning from the data collected . As for Type research used by researcher ie studies case , usage studies case because researcher can understand in a way deep context , process, and complexity moderate phenomenon researched (Iswadi et al., 2023) . Type study This possible researcher For dig perspective, experience , and possible meaning hidden in the data collected related with The influence of virtual therapy on anxiety disorders in adolescents . Results study can give in depth , contextual , and detailed insights about cases studied , which can used For inform policy , practice , or development theory more further , meanwhile subject in study This is teenagers in Malang City.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of field studies regarding anxiety disorders in adolescents in Malang City provide an in-depth picture of the complexity of this issue in the local context. Malang City, as a center for diverse youth education and activities, presents unique challenges in understanding and treating anxiety in this age group. When looking at the results of this study, one of the main findings is the significant levels of anxiety among teenagers. Factors such as academic pressure, social change, and complex developmental demands appear to be major triggers for anxiety. The high standards of achievement in leading schools in Malang City appear to place an extra burden on teenagers, often increasing their concerns regarding academic performance and the future.

Apart from that, rapid social changes in Malang City also play an important role in causing anxiety in teenagers. The dynamics of social relationships in schools and communities, especially in the digital era, can create social pressures that affect teenagers' self-confidence and self-image. These findings underscore the importance of understanding the local social context in designing effective interventions. Apart from internal factors, external factors such as the family environment also have a significant impact. The family, as a teenager's closest unit, can be a source of support or vice versa, a trigger for anxiety. High family expectations for their children's achievements can create additional stress, while a family environment that is less emotionally supportive can increase the risk of anxiety.

It is important to note that stigma towards mental health problems also emerged as a key finding. Although anxiety is a troubling issue for many teens, the stigma around it often discourages them from seeking help or talking openly about their experiences. Efforts are needed to break down this stigma and create an environment where young people feel comfortable seeking help without fear of being labeled as weak or abnormal. In the context of treatment approaches, study findings show that conventional therapy is still less available or less accessible to adolescents in Malang City. Mental health facilities are sometimes limited, and there is a need to develop broader mental health programs, especially those that can be

accessed online or via virtual platforms. The availability of virtual therapy may be an effective solution to overcome geographic barriers and increase accessibility of care.

The importance of prevention also stands out in the results of this study. Prevention efforts at the school and community level can help identify early signs of anxiety in teens and provide necessary support before problems become more serious. Education about mental health in schools, involving parents, and developing integrated mental health programs are important to reduce the prevalence of anxiety among adolescents. While the results of this study provide a better understanding of the dynamics of anxiety among adolescents in Malang City, there are still several questions that need to be answered. Further research is needed to understand the role of social media in increasing anxiety, deepening the influence of the family environment, and further exploring ways virtual therapy can be integrated into local mental health systems.

Considering these findings, concrete steps can be taken to improve the mental well-being of teenagers in Malang City. The establishment of prevention programs involving schools, families and communities is important, while increasing accessibility to mental health services, including virtual therapy, needs to be a priority in developing health infrastructure in the region. Through an in-depth understanding of the reality of anxiety among teenagers in Malang City, it can be hoped that concrete actions can be taken to create an environment that is more supportive and friendly towards mental health. By involving various stakeholders, from education, health, to the community, Malang City can be an example in responding to youth mental health challenges and creating a better future for future generations.

An interview with a counseling psychologist who focuses on virtual therapy provides in-depth insight into the effectiveness and benefits this approach can provide in reducing anxiety disorders. This expert, who has extensive experience in providing virtual therapy to various client groups, reveals various aspects that are key to the success of this intervention. First of all, the psychologist highlights the main advantage of virtual therapy, namely accessibility. In an increasingly digitally connected environment, virtual therapy allows access to psychological help regardless of geographic distance or physical barriers. The expert explained that this innovation is very important, especially for individuals in areas that are difficult to reach by conventional mental health facilities or for those who experience physical limitations that make travel difficult.

According to him, one of the positive impacts of virtual therapy is its ability to break down these boundaries. "Our clients come from all over, not only from urban areas but also remote rural areas," said the expert. "With virtual therapy, we can reach more people who might not otherwise seek psychological help if they had to travel long distances." While accessibility is a major advantage, the expert also emphasized the importance of the time flexibility that virtual therapy offers. "Many of our clients have busy schedules, especially teenagers who also have to balance schoolwork, extracurricular activities, and social activities," he said. "Virtual therapy allows them to schedule sessions at their convenience, even in the evenings or weekends."

However, the success of virtual therapy lies not only in ease of access and time flexibility. The expert highlighted the importance of building a solid therapeutic relationship with clients

through virtual platforms. "I think many people were skeptical at first, worried that the quality of the therapeutic relationship would be eroded by the absence of face-to-face contact. However, with a thoughtful approach, we have been successful in building deep relationships through virtual therapy services."

In this context, the expert explains that technology has become a tool that facilitates, not replaces, engagement between therapist and client. The use of video calls allows therapists to read clients' facial expressions and body language, which is an important element in understanding their emotional state. "Nonverbal communication remains an integral part of our therapy, and we strive to ensure that clients feel heard and understood even through a screen," he added. In treating anxiety in teens, the expert noted that virtual therapy allows for a more open and confidential approach for those who may be reluctant or embarrassed to seek help. "The stigma around mental health issues remains a significant barrier, especially among teens. Virtual therapy provides a safer and more private way for them to talk about their anxieties without fear of being labeled as weak or abnormal."

This finding is in accordance with the research results of Wardah et al., (2021) that providing distraction techniques with virtual reality media can reduce the intensity of dysmenorrhea pain by 1.14, namely from 3.75 (before administering distraction techniques with virtual reality media) to 2.61 (after providing distraction techniques with virtual reality media). The Wilcoxon test results obtained a P value of 0.000 ( $< 0.05$ ), meaning that statistically there is a significant influence between distraction techniques and virtual reality media on the intensity of dysmenorrhea. Recommendations for future researchers, it is hoped that future researchers can examine the effect of distraction techniques using virtual reality on other types of pain.

The psychologist also discussed the benefits of virtual therapy in providing a comfortable space for teenagers to explore and understand themselves. "The self-discovery process is often more effective when conducted in a familiar environment. Virtual therapy allows teens to remain in a space they consider safe, such as their bedroom, which can increase their openness and comfort in undergoing the therapeutic process." While virtual therapy has a number of advantages, the expert also acknowledged some challenges. One of them is the technological limitations that some people still face. "Even though technology is becoming more prevalent, there are still people who do not have sufficient access or may not feel comfortable using virtual platforms. We strive to address this by providing guidance and technical support to our clients."

Another challenge faced in virtual therapy is expanding the range of services without sacrificing quality. "With more clients seeking help, we must ensure that virtual therapy remains effective and produces satisfying results. This requires us to continually improve our skills and adapt to individual needs." In the context of adolescent anxiety, the expert emphasized that a combination of virtual therapy and traditional counseling approaches could be an ideal solution. "Every individual has unique needs, and we believe that a holistic approach that combines elements of virtual therapy with face-to-face meetings can provide the best results. This gives clients the option to choose the path that best suits their needs and preferences."

The expert also highlighted the need for a collaborative approach with parents and educators. "When working with adolescents, collaboration with parents and schools is essential. We strive to involve parents in the treatment process, provide additional support in the broader setting, and coordinate with teachers or school counselors when necessary." The importance of this approach for adolescent anxiety in Malang City also emerged in the discussion. The expert emphasized that recognizing and overcoming anxiety in adolescents is not only the responsibility of individuals or families, but is also the responsibility of society and educational institutions. "We need to work together as a community to create an environment that supports the development of adolescent mental health. Education about mental health must be integrated into school curricula and various community programs."

In concluding the interview, the expert underscored the importance of ongoing research and evaluation of the effectiveness of virtual therapy in treating anxiety in adolescents. "By continuing to collect data and listening to clients' experiences, we can continue to improve and optimize our services. Ongoing research can also provide an empirical basis for demonstrating the benefits of virtual therapy in specific contexts, such as Malang City." This interview with a virtual therapy counseling psychologist provides in-depth and diverse views on this innovative approach. By understanding the perspective of a practitioner who is on the front lines, we can better recognize the advantages, challenges, and potential of virtual therapy in helping reduce anxiety disorders in adolescents. Through collaboration, ongoing research, and joint efforts, virtual therapy can continue to develop as an effective and relevant alternative for providing mental health services.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that virtual therapy has an effect in reducing the level of anxiety among teenagers in Malang City. Virtual therapy allows teens to remain in a space they consider safe, such as their bedroom, which can increase their openness and comfort in undergoing the therapeutic process. The results of these field findings provide information that reducing the level of anxiety among teenagers in Malang City requires collaboration from various parties, including educational institutions, government and society. Regarding adolescent anxiety in Malang City, further research by future researchers is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of virtual therapy in overcoming anxiety in adolescents.

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