

## THE APPLICATION OF EXPRESSIVE WRITING THERAPY TO REDUCE AUDITORY HALLUCINATIONS IN SCHIZOPHRENIA PATIENTS AT TAMPAN MENTAL HOSPITAL, RIAU PROVINCE

Retno Tri Utari<sup>1\*</sup>, Rina Herniyanti<sup>1\*</sup>, Yeni Devita<sup>1</sup>, Afrida Sriyani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Program Study of Profesi Ners, Faculty of Nursing, Institut Kesehatan Payung Negeri,  
Pekanbaru, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: [retnotriutari1@gmail.com](mailto:retnotriutari1@gmail.com) [rinaherniyanti23@gmail.com](mailto:rinaherniyanti23@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Schizophrenia is a chronic psychiatric disorder characterized by disturbances in perception, thought, and behavior. Auditory hallucinations are one of the most common and distressing positive symptoms experienced by individuals with schizophrenia. This study aimed to apply expressive writing therapy to reduce the frequency and intensity of auditory hallucinations in schizophrenia patients at Tampan Mental Hospital, Riau Province, in 2025. The study used an Evidence-Based Nursing (EBN) approach with an experimental (intervention) design. Three patients diagnosed with schizophrenia and auditory hallucinations were selected based on inclusion criteria. Expressive writing therapy was implemented for four consecutive days, once daily in the morning from 09:00 to 11:00 a.m., for approximately 20–30 minutes per session. Data were collected through observation, participation, and interviews using the Auditory Hallucination Rating Scale (AHRS) before and after therapy to assess changes in hallucination intensity. The results showed that expressive writing therapy effectively reduced hallucination scores in all participants. Patient Tn. H's AHRS score decreased from 26 to 17, Tn. A's score decreased from 25 to 19, and Tn. M's score decreased from 23 to 18. Patients reported feeling calmer, more relaxed, and more in control of their thoughts after therapy. In conclusion, expressive writing therapy is an effective non-pharmacological intervention for reducing auditory hallucinations in schizophrenia patients. It helps improve emotional regulation, promote self-expression, and enhance nurse–patient therapeutic relationships. The findings support integrating expressive writing into psychiatric nursing care to complement pharmacological treatment and improve patient outcomes.

**Keywords:** expressive writing therapy 1, auditory hallucinations 2, schizophrenia 3, nursing intervention 4, Evidence-Based Nursing 5.

### INTRODUCTION

Mental disorders are conditions characterized by disturbances in emotions, thought processes, behavior, and perception (Mulia et al., 2021). According to the Indonesian Ministry of Health, mental disorders are health conditions that affect thinking, mood, behavior, or a combination of these aspects, which may occur temporarily or persist chronically (Kemenkes, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) has declared mental disorders a major global health concern. It is estimated that around 24 million people worldwide live with schizophrenia. In the Southeast Asian region, more than 68 million people experience mental health disorders, including approximately 27.3 million Indonesians (Nanang et al., 2022).

Based on the 2018 Basic Health Research (Riskesdas), the prevalence of households with family members suffering from schizophrenia in Indonesia increased from 1.7‰ in 2013 to 7‰ in 2018, showing a significant rise in schizophrenia cases (Kemenkes RI, 2018). The Riau Province Health Profile (2020) reported that 9,533 people were living with mental disorders, with 36.7% (3,498 individuals) residing in Pekanbaru City.

Hallucination is one of the main symptoms of mental disorders, in which patients experience sensory perception disturbances and are unable to distinguish between internal stimuli (thoughts) and external stimuli (reality) (Emulyani & Herlambang, 2020). Hallucinations are categorized into five types: auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile. Among these, auditory hallucinations are the most common, affecting around 70% of patients with schizophrenia (Diah & Nur, 2022). Auditory hallucinations involve hearing voices or sounds that command or criticize the patient, often causing distress and unsafe behaviors.

The impact of auditory hallucinations can be severe—patients may lose self-control, harm themselves or others, or experience panic, anxiety, and disorganized thoughts (Diah & Nur, 2022). To manage such symptoms, both pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions are required. While antipsychotic medication targets symptom reduction, non-pharmacological therapy focuses on psychological and behavioral interventions. One promising method is expressive writing therapy, a structured writing activity that enables individuals to express emotions, process experiences, and achieve emotional balance (Jusuf et al., 2023).

Studies have shown that expressive writing can reduce hallucination intensity and emotional burden. Research by Rohadatul et al. (2024) reported that auditory hallucination frequency decreased from 4–5 times per day to once or none after therapy. Similarly, Andrini et al. (2024) observed reduced hallucination symptoms after two days of intervention. Nurjannah et al. (2024) found that expressive writing therapy lowered PSYRATS scores from severe to moderate levels, and Buanasari & Suhamo (2024) noted a reduction in auditory hallucination scores from 24 to 19 after therapy.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The implementation of Evidence-Based Nursing (EBN) practice in this study involved the application of expressive writing therapy. The method employed was an experimental (intervention) approach applied to patients with auditory hallucinations who had a nursing diagnosis of sensory perception disturbance.

The success of the intervention was evaluated by measuring hallucination scores using the Auditory Hallucination Rating Scale (AHRs) before and after the intervention. Expressive writing therapy was administered, and changes in hallucination scores were observed using the same instrument following the completion of therapy.

The observed results were then compared between the hallucination scores obtained before the first day of the intervention and after the third day of expressive writing therapy implementation. This comparison aimed to assess the effectiveness of expressive writing in reducing the frequency and intensity of auditory hallucinations among patients with schizophrenia.

### 1. Data Collection and Indicators of Success :

The subjects in this case study were three psychiatric patients diagnosed with auditory hallucinations and a nursing problem of sensory perception disturbance. The Evidence-Based Nursing (EBN) intervention involved the implementation of expressive writing therapy, conducted for 20–30 minutes per session over four consecutive days. Before the first day and after the fourth day of the intervention, each participant was observed and evaluated using the Auditory Hallucination Rating Scale (AHRs) to measure changes in hallucination intensity. The detailed steps of the expressive writing therapy procedure are provided in the appendix.

The subjects participating in this intervention were patients with auditory hallucinations in the Sabayang Ward of Tampan Mental Hospital, Riau Province.

The inclusion criteria for participants were as follows:

- a. Diagnosed with a nursing problem of hallucination.
- b. In a calm phase (not in a state of severe agitation).
- c. Willing to participate in the treatment or therapy program.
- d. Able to communicate verbally.

## 2. Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique used in this Evidence-Based Nursing (EBN) practice was descriptive data analysis, which aimed to illustrate the results of the pre-test and post-test assessments. Data processing was conducted by comparing the outcomes of the three respondents before and after the implementation of expressive writing therapy using the Auditory Hallucination Rating Scale (AHRS) observation sheet.

The data collection methods included observation/participation and interviews during the intervention process. The level of hallucination was measured using the AHRS (Auditory Hallucination Rating Scale) throughout the implementation period to evaluate changes in hallucination intensity and frequency.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### 3. Procedure

The expressive writing therapy was conducted in four sessions. Before beginning the therapy, patients were instructed to prepare a pen and paper. Each session lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was facilitated in a calm and comfortable environment to encourage emotional expression.

Session 1: Free writing. Patients were encouraged to write freely about anything that came to mind to create a sense of comfort and stimulate enthusiasm for writing.

Session 2: Writing about personal experiences. Patients were asked to describe both sad and pleasant experiences they had encountered in their lives.

Session 3: Writing about hopes and future goals. In this session, patients wrote about their aspirations, dreams, and life goals, helping to build positive thinking and motivation.

Session 4: Termination session. Patients were guided to express their current feelings and reflections after completing the writing sessions, allowing emotional release and self-awareness.

The results obtained from the implementation of expressive writing therapy over a period of four days were as follows:

Patient Tn. H stated that he often heard voices commanding him to hit other people. These hallucinations caused him to feel anxious and sometimes lose control of his behavior.

Patient Tn. A reported that he frequently wandered into residents' homes, causing disturbance in the neighborhood. He mentioned hearing a male voice inviting him to go somewhere, and the voices typically appeared from morning until noon. The patient explained that the voices occurred occasionally, especially when he was feeling stressed or had many problems.

Patient Tn. M said that he heard a male voice telling him that he was worthless as a man because he did not have a stable job or a good income. The hallucinations usually appeared

when he was deep in thought or feeling down. Nursing Diagnosis based on the findings in the field, the identified nursing diagnosis was sensory perception disturbance: auditory hallucination.

The nursing intervention for the diagnosis of sensory perception disturbance: auditory hallucination involved the application of expressive writing therapy and the implementation of Standard Psychiatric Nursing Actions (SP 1–4). The intervention aimed to help patients recognize and control their hallucinations, express emotions appropriately, and enhance self-awareness.

The implementation included four consecutive days of therapy sessions, consisting of expressive writing activities and SP 1–4 interventions. Expressive writing therapy was conducted for approximately 20–30 minutes per session, allowing patients to express their emotions and thoughts through writing. SP 1–4 interventions focused on helping patients identify hallucinations, control them using distraction techniques, apply adaptive coping strategies, and maintain self-control independently.

The evaluation of the intervention showed that on the fourth day, patients reported occasionally still hearing whispering voices, but these hallucinations had decreased in frequency and intensity. The patients also stated that they wanted to go home and reunite with their families, indicating improved emotional stability, awareness, and motivation toward recovery.

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test scores of auditory hallucination patients after expressive writing therapy:

Participan	Pre test	Post test	category
tn. H	26	17	decreased
tn. A	25	19	decreased
tn. M	23	18	decreased

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrated that the application of expressive writing therapy combined with standard psychiatric nursing interventions (SP 1–4) was effective in reducing the frequency and intensity of auditory hallucinations among patients with schizophrenia. This improvement was observed through a decrease in AHRS scores and patients' self-reported experiences, indicating better emotional regulation and control over hallucinations.

Expressive writing therapy allows patients to express their emotions, thoughts, and inner conflicts in a structured and reflective manner. According to Pennebaker and Smyth (2016), expressive writing facilitates cognitive restructuring and emotional release, helping individuals process stressful experiences and gain insight into their emotions. Through writing, patients in this study were able to externalize their fears, frustrations, and hopes, which contributed to reduced anxiety and improved self-control.

These findings are consistent with previous studies by Nurhidayati and Fathoni (2021) and Umasugi et al. (2020), which reported that expressive writing therapy effectively reduces hallucination intensity and enhances psychological well-being. The therapy also fosters better communication between nurses and patients, promoting trust and engagement in the therapeutic process. Furthermore, implementing SP 1–4 interventions helped patients

recognize their hallucinations, apply coping strategies, and gradually regain control of their thoughts and behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, expressive writing therapy is an effective non-pharmacological intervention for managing auditory hallucinations in patients with schizophrenia. The combination of expressive writing and SP 1–4 interventions helped reduce hallucination frequency, improve emotional stability, and enhance patients' motivation and insight.

This therapy encourages patients to channel negative emotions into written expression, fostering self-awareness and emotional healing. It can be implemented as a complementary approach in mental health nursing to support pharmacological treatment, strengthen therapeutic relationships, and improve the overall quality of psychiatric care.

## REFERENCES

- Nurhidayati, T., & Fathoni, M. (2021). Pengaruh terapi menulis ekspresif terhadap penurunan frekuensi halusinasi pada pasien skizofrenia. *Jurnal Keperawatan Jiwa*, 9(2), 123–130.
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1997). *Opening up: The healing power of expressing emotions*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Pennebaker, J. W., & Smyth, J. M. (2016). *Opening up by writing it down: How expressive writing improves health and eases emotional pain* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Sari, D. A., Lestari, Y., & Pratama, R. (2022). Expressive writing therapy untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan psikologis pasien skizofrenia. *Indonesian Journal of Psychiatric Nursing*, 5(1), 34–42.
- Umasugi, M., Wulandari, A., & Hasanah, N. (2020). Terapi menulis ekspresif dalam menurunkan beban emosional pasien skizofrenia. *Jurnal Ilmu Keperawatan*, 8(1), 55–63.
- Urstad, K. H., Lien, L., & Haug, E. (2022). Hallucinations in schizophrenia: Prevalence, impact, and treatment approaches. *Schizophrenia Research*, 241, 12–19.
- Liu, Y., Zhang, H., Chen, X., & Wang, J. (2023). The effectiveness of expressive writing therapy in reducing psychotic symptoms and improving emotional regulation: A systematic review. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 160, 45–53.
- Aisy, Rohadatul, Rauzatul Syarifah Jannah, dan Marthoenis. 2024. "Penerapan Terapi Menulis Ekspresif pada Pasien Halusinasi Pendengaran: Suatu Studi Kasus." *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Fakultas Keperawatan* 8(2): 118–25.
- Nurjannah, Siti, Sri Wahyuni, dan Rosdiar Rosdiar. 2024. "Expressive Writing Therapy Pada Pasien Gangguan Persepsi Sensori: Halusinasi." *Surya Medika: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Keperawatan dan Ilmu Kesehatan Masyarakat* 19(3): 176–81.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *DSM-5-TR: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing.
- Stuart, G. W. (2021). *Principles and Practice of Psychiatric Nursing* (11th ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.
- Videbeck, S. L. (2023). *Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing* (9th ed.). Philadelphia: Wolters Kluwer.
- Vancarolis, E. M., & Halter, M. J. (2022). *Foundations of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing: A Clinical Approach* (9th ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.

- Demaine, K. L., & Einstein, T. R. (2025). *Expressive Therapeutic Writing: Guiding Transformation and Restorative Care through Intermodal Arts*. London: Routledge.
- Pennebaker, J. W., & Evans, J. F. (2024). *Expressive Writing: Words That Heal*. Berkeley, CA: Idyll Arbor.
- Smyth, J. M., & Helm, R. (2023). *Written Emotional Disclosure: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Springer.
- Bolton, G., Field, V., & Thompson, K. (2022). *Writing Works: A Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Morrison, A. P., et al. (2021). *A Manualised Treatment Protocol to Reduce Distress from Auditory Hallucinations*. London: Routledge.
- Wright, J. H., Brown, G. K., Thase, M. E., & Basco, M. R. (2021). *Learning Cognitive-Behavior Therapy: An Illustrated Guide* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing.