

## OVERVIEW OF DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS IN ADOLESCENTS (DRAWING ANALYSIS BASED ON WADESON'S ART THERAPY STUDIES)

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### ABSTRACT

*Adolescence is a crucial period for the physical and psychological development of an individual. Sometimes depressed adolescents may have difficulty expressing their emotions and feeling in words or verbally. Depressed adolescents also need to release painful emotions for themselves in order to feel relief or freedom. One of the media for depressed adolescents to express their emotions is through painting or drawing. The purpose of this study was to see how is the overview of adolescents' depressive symptoms based on drawing analysis. Wadeson's art therapy studies were used as the guidelines to analyzed the drawings with formal and content analysis technique. This study used a qualitative approach with a total of 11 participants who attended drawing sessions that were held at Universitas Tarumanagara. Beck Depression Inventory II was used to select participants with moderate and severe depression. The results of the study showed that depressive symptoms in adolescents' drawings were seen using strong pressure, disorganized, organic shapes and human figure, dominated with blue and green color also neutral colors, repetitive and thick lines, focal point on the objects, less detail, emptiness and sadness contents, negative affect, and good effort on drawing.*

**Keywords:** Art Therapy, Drawing, Adolescent, Depression

### 1. PREFACE

Depression is a common mental health problem that has been experienced by almost every person in this world [1], [2]. In Indonesia, it is estimated that more than 6,1% or 11 million people in the age 15 and above are suffered from depression [3]. Depression in adolescents that can lead to suicide can be cause by bullying, academic stress, and family or economic issues [4]. Depression in adolescents is usually not detected early and some people may realize there's a problem with depressed adolescents after they seem to changed especially in their daily behaviour [2]. Adolescents that suffered from depression may feel uncomfortable telling their problems to others because they fear of getting stigmatized and seen as someone abnormal. In some countries, depression is often considered a problem related to one's faith or religion than psychological disorder that requires professional help. This is one of factor that made depressed adolescents keep their emotions [5].

Depressed adolescents may have difficulty expressing their emotions and feeling in words or verbally. Depressed adolescents also need to release painful emotions for themselves in order to feel relief or freedom. One of the media for depressed adolescents to express their emotions is through drawing. Drawing in art therapy can help adolescents to communicate their emotions and feelings [6]. Individuals, especially adolescents, are able to express themselves better when they feel safe and comfortable [7].

Drawing is a form of communication by touching aspects of creativity in a non-threatening and safe manner, also can be controlled by themselves. The art of drawing can cause relaxation and help individuals to get information about themselves unconsciously [8]. Hidden information or messages from individuals can be seen through drawing, especially those depressed people were not able to communicate it verbally [9].

It can be said art therapy is an effective method for people with depression to communicate themselves through art, not just verbally [10], [1]. There are some difficulties of expressing emotions with words. Words can be used to describe expressions of emotions in art, but the important message is conveyed in the form of images so describing it through words may lose the meaning or misunderstand the meaning. Image is one of the roles in the formation of a person's personality and character [1]. The existence of visualization of images that come from one's deepest consciousness can increase creativity. Feelings and ideas can be described through drawing. Through images, an individual is more likely to recognize and understand their existences [1].

The aim of this study is to see an overview of depression symptoms through drawing analysis. Drawings are analyzed with guidelines from Wadeson's art therapy studies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Depression**

Depression is a psychological disorder characterized by loss of interest and enjoyment, loss concentration and motivation, deep sadness with self-blame that caused by illogical thinking [11], [12]. The DSM-5 outlines the following criterion to make a diagnosis of depression. The individual must be experiencing five or more symptoms during the same 2-week period and at least, the symptoms are (a) Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, (b) Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day, (c) Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. (d) insomnia, (e) A slowing down of thought and a reduction of physical movement observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down), (f) Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day. (g) Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt nearly every day. (h) Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day. (i) Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.

Depression is divided into several levels such as mild depression, moderate depression, and severe depression [13]. Depression can be caused by predisposition factor that consists of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factor [14]. The other factor that can cause depression is precipitating factor such as stimulus that challenges, threatens or demands the individual. Examples of precipitating factors are loss of bond, loss of love or someone, loss of physical function, loss of status or self-esteem [14]

### **Wadeson's Art Psychotherapy Studies**

Art psychotherapy is a treatment that uses art media, images, the creative process of art. Through individual's responses to the art work, it produces as a reflection of an individual's personality, interest, center of attention and conflicts [1], [15]. Wadeson [1] has a goal in her career to use creativity to explore human's condition through art therapy. Wadeson in [16] encourages

therapists to work in their own way be demonstrating and applying the uniqueness of their own approach.

Wadeson [1] described her approach as humanistic, existential and phenomenological. Art therapy should be able to help a person to solve life's problem rather than as a treatment for illness [1]. Wadeson [1] states that through art psychotherapy, individuals can train their attention, improve motor control and train to focus on doing one thing. Wadeson [1] also explains that to do art psychotherapy, individuals do not need to have good artistic skills.

According to Wadeson [1], art therapy can be done individually also in groups or can be referred to as an art therapy group. There are more challenges in group art therapy such as client-to-client relationships and more complex image characteristics for each group. Although art therapy is carried out in groups, the goal is the same, to solve one's problem of each group. There are several things that need to be considered in art therapy group, such as group composition, structure (including rules and contracts), and the role of the therapist [1].

### **Drawing**

Drawing is an activity of pouring visual perceptions or thoughts into image media [17]. Drawing can be a form of embodiment of expression of thoughts which can be in the form of wishful thinking or a direct and spontaneous feelings from the artist [17], [18]. In drawing activities, individual will produce an artwork that can be called drawing or image. Drawing or image is a work of art to illustrate ideas or thoughts in to two-dimensional form [19].

Artworks have aesthetic values and different characteristics, styles and forms. The character of a work of art is the personality or characteristic, style, and form of each work of art that a person draws. Wadeson described the characteristics of a drawing or image that can help to understand the individual's drawing, such as such as media, organization, space, shapes, colors, lines, focal point, movement, details, content, affect, and effort [1]. Drawings can be analyzed using formal and content analysis.

Wadeson [1] also conducted a study related to the characteristics of depression drawings and found several characteristics of depression drawings, such as: (a) less color or reduced use of color, (b) lots of space or empty space, (c) lots of constriction or narrowing and more limited, (d) Disorganized, (e) Lack of effort or lack of completeness or incompleteness, (f) Not or less meaningful drawings, (g) Depressive affect or depressive symbols such as dark colors and weak pressure, (h) less affect and usually displays more depressive affect, and (i) Positive affect or symbols and bright colors with meanings of hopeful, happiness or nostalgia for past happiness.

### **Adolescents**

Adolescence is divided into three stages, early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence. Early adolescence is determined from the age range of 13 to 15 years. Middle adolescence from the ages of 16 to 17 years. Late adolescence from the age range of 18 to 21 years [20], [21]. Adolescence is a transition period because at this time an individual has not yet become an adult and also no longer has the status of a child [22].

An individual who is in transition period will experience many changes in themselves. Adolescents will experience changes in terms of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial [21], [23]. Many changes in the physical, emotional and social environment in adolescents can make adolescents vulnerable to various mental health problems. The unpreparedness of adolescents in

dealing with various problems and changes in life can be one of the factors that causes the potential factor of adolescents to experience depression [23], Adolescence is a period that can be referred as '*sturm und drang*' which means typhoons and storms. At this time, teenagers are full of emotions and those emotions can explode any time. This can happen because of a bad life event or experience such as violence or problems in the family or environment [24]. Many adolescents are not aware that they suffer from depression [13].

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach and criterion sampling technique. The selected research subject has several criteria, namely, (a) adolescents, aged 13-21 years; (b) live in DKI Jakarta; (c) suffered from moderate and severe depression based on Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II). Beck Depression Inventory II is a 21-item self-report rating inventory that measures characteristic attitude and symptoms of depression.

Participants' moderate and severe depression were scored based on the results of the Beck Depression Inventory II test, moderate depression with a score between 20-28 and severe depression with a score between 29-63 [25]. Other than questionnaire, this study also used observation, interview, and documentary for data collection. Observation was used to see participants' effort.

**Table 1**

*Subject Description*

Subjects' Initial	BDI-II Score	Description	Drawing Session Date
S	21	Moderate	May 12, 2022
D	23	Moderate	May 12, 2022
A	24	Moderate	May 11, 2022
T	27	Moderate	May 11, 2022
J	29	Severe	June 10, 2022
M	32	Severe	May 11, 2022
NT	36	Severe	June 10, 2022
H	38	Severe	June 8, 2022
N	39	Severe	June 10, 2022
TD	42	Severe	June 10, 2022
L	52	Severe	June 8, 2022

Drawing sessions in this study were held at Universitas Tarumanagara. Universitas Tarumanagara was selected as the place for drawing session because there were some considerations, such as (a) secure environment for privacy, (b) rooms were in good condition and good lighting, (c) rooms were cleaned and drawing materials were organized. In this study, researcher used A2 art paper (59,4cm x 42 cm) with 220 gsm and oil pastels. A2 art paper was used to stimulate participants to draw their emotions and feelings freely and comfortable.

Oil pastels was used because it was easier to control than acrylic or oil painting. Oil pastels is easy to use, not taking a long time, and not hard to clean. There was also question sheet. Question sheet contained questions about drawing's name and meaning, meaning of colors that were used in the drawing, meaning of symbols in the drawings, and how the participant's feel after finished drawing. Interview was required to reconfirmed the data in question sheet and to see how well the participants interpreted their drawings.

Participants were divided into 4 groups and drawing sessions were held at different times for each group. There were few steps in drawing session, (a) before participants drew, researcher had to build rapport first, (b) informed consent, made sure that all the participants understood their rights, (c) gave the participants their drawing materials, such as A2 art paper and oil pastels, (d) instruction, the instruction was "right now in front of you there are one paper and one set of oil pastels. Your task is to draw with free theme that can explain or draw your feelings right now". After the instruction was told, researcher had to make sure all the participants understood the instruction and after that they can began to draw, (e) drawing session ended when the participant felt they drew enough, (f) participant that already finished continue to filled question sheet. Researcher conducted a question-and-answer session based on the question sheet that had been filled in by the participants to reconfirm the written data, (f) researcher documented the participants' drawing and analyzed them using guidelines in Wadeson's art therapy studies.

### **3. RESULT AND DISSUSSION**

Through formal analysis, researcher analyzed the elements of all 11 participants' drawings. Through content analysis, research analyzed the content of all 11 participants' drawings. Guidelines from Wadeson's art therapy studies were used to analyzed all 11 participants' drawings. There are 12 elements that can be analyzed in the individual's drawing.

#### **Formal and Content Analysis**

##### **Media**

Most participants were seen using strong pressure of oil pastels. Strong pressure on the image indicates the energy of the artist [1]. This element was different than Wadeson's where she found depressed people more likely to draw using weak pressure. The media pressure of oil pastels seems to be strongly emphasized even though people know that oil pastels have a soft texture and are easy to break. Through pressure, individual's control on drawing can be seen. When an oil pastel is brittle, participants were seen still drawing with strong pressure, whether the individual. Control of media can be seen when participants knew oil pastels have soft texture and easily break, will they press with a force as strong as the previous pressure. So that the use of strong pressure on the drawings can indicate the existence of drawing control on the individual. This result was different from Wadeson's [1] study that showed depressed people tend to draw with weak pressure.

##### **Organization**

Organization in drawings can be achieved from the existence of a good relationship and combination in each element of art. Unity in drawing organization is a diverse part of a work of art that can give the impression of togetherness without making one of the other parts look out of place [33]. Balance of elements and well placement object can give the impression of organized, stable and beautiful [1], [33].

Most participants' drawings were disorganized that can be seen through elements of color, pressure, and even the technique of applying the oil pastels. According to Wadeson [1], a disorganized drawing can indicate a chaotic mind from the artist. In addition to disorganized thoughts, disorganized drawings can also indicate poor attention control [1]. Disorganized can also be referred as messy art [26]. Through messy drawings, one can express emotions without fear of mistakes when describing them [27]. Wadeson's [1] study also showed that depressed people tend to draw disorganically. In this study, participants with severe depression were likely to draw disorganized art than participants with moderate depression.

### **Space**

In drawing, space is divided into two types, positive space and negative space. Positive space is an area that is drawn with object. Negative space is an area around the object that being drawn. Negative space is different from empty space. Empty space is an area that wasn't covered with colors or being drawn. Negative space can be covered with colors unlike empty space but empty space can be found in negative space [34].

Most participants' drawings were dominated by the use of empty space. Empty spaces were seen in the negative space. According to Wadeson [1], the used of empty space in the drawing can indicate a sense of emptiness from the artist. The used of empty space is not always negative, it can also describe a sense of peace [28]. This element was also found in Wadeson's [1] study which she found that the higher the depression experienced by a person, the wider the use of empty space.

### **Shapes**

In drawing, object can be drawn by using shapes and form. Shape is a two-dimensional area on a drawing surface. Shape can be formed in geometric or regular and organic or freeform forms. Geometric shapes are shapes that can be described using mathematical formulas such as circle, square, rectangle, triangle, etc. Freeform forms consist of irregular shapes. While form is an art element that describes objects into three-dimensional shapes [35].

Most participants drew organic shapes or freeform and human form. Organic shapes in participants drawings drawn mostly with flowers and tree. There was also abstracted organic shapes such as earth that drawn with disorganized lines and colors. There was also a drawing of abstracted and human figures by adding elements that weren't originally seen in the reality, such as circle eyes, circle mouth, thick red lines on the body part. Shapes or forms in the drawings were seen tend to be drawn in the middle of the paper.

### **Colors**

Most participants' drawings were dominated by blue, green and neutral colors. According to Wadeson [1], the color blue can be associated with freedom, limitations, and death. However, several other clients of Wadeson [1] also associate the color blue with affection and sexuality. Green is represented as strength and envious [1]. In this study, there were also used of neutral colors such as brown, gray and black. Neutral colors were used in the large areas or as a border. This element was different from Wadeson's [1] study that found the use of black and dark color. Not participants in this study used dark colors. Some of the participants were seen using bright color even though they suffered from depression. In this study, most participant' choose their colors arbitrarily, which every color that they chose have different meaning to expressed or communicated the artists' feelings. There were also participants that had a hard time to answer when they were being asked why did they choose the colors in their drawings.

### **Lines**

Lines were seen from the strength, thickness, accuracy, direction and number of lines [1]. Most participants' drawings were using repetitive and thick lines. The using of thick lines can be caused by strong pressure of oil pastels. Strong pressure on the drawing can make the lines in the drawing bold. Bold lines in the image add the impression of boldness or courage and strength. Bold lines can be used to highlight the main focus of a drawing that is the center of emotions and feelings. The use of lines in participants also seems to have repetition. Line repetition was also found by the study of Penzes et al. [30] The pattern of repeated lines in the drawings can indicate an emotional outburst to make an individual calmer [1]. In this study, participants with less effort on drawing tend to draw object only with lines and not filled it with colors. Some of the participants also used zigzag lines to colored the large area on their drawings but the color seemed to not covered the area really well.

### **Focal Point**

Direction of the drawing or focal point composition that the artist focuses on can have a certain meaning and significance [1]. The center of direction focus is the most visually appealing area of composition in a drawing. Most participants' focal points were focused on the object in the middle of the paper. The focal point was not always located in the middle of the paper, but can be seen in other areas. This can happen because objects can be placed anywhere. There is a possibility of object is placed in the middle so that the emotional depiction can be described and communicated effectively [29].

### **Movement**

Movement displays energy in the drawings. Movement is an important part of composition because it can give the drawings a character that can tell the viewers of what happened to the drawing [36]. Most movement in participants' drawings were seen through object. Objects with movements were drawn facing some side to indicate that object moving with that side direction. To make a drawing have more depth to convey emotions and feelings, the artist can add movement to the drawing. Movement in the drawing can be seen from the object or from the background through pattern in negative space or lines. The movement of the drawing indicates the story pattern that were told or thought by the artist [29]. Some participants showed effort in drawing movements by using lines. Lines were made constricted in one area so it created illusion of going down.

### **Details**

The details of the drawing linked to the organization and effort of the artists to draw. Accuracy and detailed organization or lack of detail (incompleteness) can indicate the needs of the artist [1]. All participants' drawings showed of less detail. There is a saying that '*less is more*'. In this study, a drawing with less detail is actually possible to display the emotions and feelings of the artist [31]. Emotions in drawings do not always have to be described in detail, sometimes emotions appear in abstract drawings [32]. Less detail was seen by the used of the line, pattern, colors. In this study, there were so many incompleteness in the drawings such as missing body part, areas that weren't being colored carefully, unstable pattern, and disorganized drawing.

### **Content**

Most participants' content in drawings were emptiness and sadness. Content describes the message of the artist that is communicated through the drawings. In interpreting the content in the image, it is necessary to explain in advance from the advance in order to reduce

misunderstandings [1]. In this study, contents of the drawings were reconfirmed with participants' statements during the interview. Content of emptiness can be seen along the used of empty space that indicated emptiness [1]. In this study, there were some participants that drew positive and negative contents on one drawing to expressed conflict.

### **Affect**

Most participants' drawings were seen to have negative affect. Participants' drawings were dominated by negative affect which included sadness content. Affects in drawings can not only appeared in human figures' expression, but can also appear in abstract form and non-human objects. In this study, affect in the drawings were reconfirmed with participants' statements during the interview. Negative affect often linked to negative content [1]. In this study, research found that there were participants that showed less affect in their drawings and also by interview. Some participants showed passive behaviour when being asked to interpret their drawings.

### **Effort**

Most participants showed good effort on drawing and interpreting their drawings. Efforts to draw have nothing to do with good quality or not. The possibility of trying to draw is seen because depressed adolescents feel comfortable talking to people who they think understand them and also struggling with their sadness. Richardson [7] found that individuals, especially adolescents, are able to express themselves better when they feel safe and comfortable. A sense of comfort and security from the environment and within themselves is possible to be a supporting factor for a good effort in drawing. This element was different from Wadeson's study that found depressed people tend to draw with less effort.

## **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The results of the study showed that depressive symptoms in adolescents' drawings were seen using strong pressure, disorganized, organic shapes and human figure, dominated with blue and green color also neutral colors, repetitive and thick lines, focal point on the objects, less detail, emptiness and sadness contents, negative affect, and good effort on drawing. Some of the drawings characteristics seem to have differences from the results of Wadeson's study of depression drawings. These differences were seen in the strong pressure, the use of color that is not less, and good effort on drawing.

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