

The Effectiveness of Traumatic Counseling to Reduce Inner Child Trauma in Female Students

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v10i5.1329>

*Ica Dwi Agustin, Weni Kurnia Rahmawati, Nailul Fauziyah 

¹²³PGRI Argopuro Jember University, Indonesia

Corresponding Author : icadwiagustin4@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of traumatic counseling in reducing inner child trauma among female students at Universitas PGRI Argopuro Jember. Negative childhood experiences can lead to unresolved trauma that impacts adult behavior and mental well-being, hindering academic and personal growth. The research employed a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design. A purposive sample of six female students with moderate to high childhood trauma was selected. Data was collected using a validated inner child trauma questionnaire and analyzed with a paired-sample t-test. The intervention consisted of six sessions incorporating writing therapy and a multicultural approach. The results showed a significant reduction in trauma scores from pretest to posttest ($p < 0.05$), indicating the counseling's high effectiveness. The intervention was particularly successful in improving emotional regulation, self-worth, and reducing feelings of guilt. These findings suggest that this integrated counseling model is a viable and effective method for addressing childhood trauma in university students.

Keywords: *Counseling, Multicultural Approach, Student Trauma, Traumatic Counseling, Writing Therapy.*

Article History:

Received 07th August 2025

Accepted 03rd September 2025

Published 09th September 2025



INTRODUCTION

Human social existence is often shaped by interactions that, while essential, can sometimes lead to conflict and deviation from initial expectations, resulting in psychological and physical harm (Suryadi, 2024). When such negative experiences occur during childhood, they may leave lasting psychological wounds known as trauma. Trauma is an intense psychological response to dreadful events, leading to long-term behavioral changes and disruption of mental well-being (Surianti, 2022). Its effects may manifest as abnormal behaviors, the inability to move on from painful experiences, and significant challenges in daily functioning.

The psychological remnants of childhood trauma are often described as the inner child, a concept referring to past experiences that continue to influence an individual's present life (Dewi et al., 2023). Unresolved inner child wounds can negatively affect personal development and social interactions, while acknowledgment and acceptance of these wounds may facilitate healing and positive growth (Nuroh in Dewi et al., 2023). Thus, the inner child represents not only emotional memory but also a powerful determinant of adult personality and behavior.

Childhood trauma—such as neglect, abuse, or authoritarian parenting—can make it difficult for individuals to express their emotions, often resulting in issues with trust, intimacy, and compulsive behaviors (Sari Nopi Nopita, Satria Irsyad Bagus, Fauzan Riski Tri, 2025; Surianti, 2022). The wounded inner child frequently reveals itself through persistent sadness, anger, anxiety, or discomfort triggered by past memories. Without intervention, these emotions may intensify, creating significant internal pain whenever individuals encounter situations that remind them of their trauma.

Such unhealed wounds have a profound impact on relationships, both personal and professional. Individuals may seek excessive validation due to unmet childhood needs for

affection, which disrupts healthy connections with others (Raditya Raifanda in Surianti, 2022). This challenge becomes particularly critical during adolescence and young adulthood, periods that Erikson (2024) identifies as crucial for identity formation. In this phase, unresolved trauma can impede the ability to form stable emotional bonds and hinder psychosocial development (Khairunnisa & Saptandari, 2023).

University students represent a vulnerable group in this regard, as they face demanding developmental tasks such as establishing identity and achieving social integration. Inner child trauma can lead to low self-esteem, poor emotional regulation, and persistent guilt or shame, all of which threaten academic success. For female students, these challenges may be compounded by societal pressures and gender-related trauma, further increasing vulnerability (Gustama et al., 2025). Ultimately, unresolved trauma can manifest as academic instability and declining performance (Putri, 2020).

To address these challenges, trauma counseling provides a structured process of healing and forgiveness, guiding individuals through their experiences over time (Nihayah et al., 2022). Unlike general counseling, trauma counseling focuses on the specific symptoms causing distress, with the goal of helping clients recover from their trauma (Suryadi, 2024). For those unable to articulate emotions easily, narrative therapy can be integrated, offering storytelling and expressive writing as tools to process and reframe experiences (Tasya Diandra Aulia et al., 2024).

Narrative therapy not only enables emotional expression but also builds confidence and provides students with strategies to manage their feelings (Khadijah & Zakky Abdul Ghoni, 2022; Aisyah et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2024). This method requires collaboration between counselor and client, allowing the individual to redefine their life's narrative in a supportive environment (Istiqomah et al., 2024). Such collaborative efforts strengthen the counseling process and empower clients to move forward with greater resilience.

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of a traumatic counseling model designed specifically for female students at Universitas PGRI Argopuro Jember. The model combines writing therapy with a multicultural approach, ensuring cultural sensitivity and relevance for diverse student populations (Manurung & Rahmi, 2022). By helping students embrace their cultural identities, this approach fosters self-confidence and improves social interactions (Rahmah et al., 2024; Nailul, 2022). The research offers a novel intervention by integrating trauma counseling with multicultural elements, addressing a gap in existing literature and providing a practical, culturally adaptable model for guidance and counseling services in Indonesian universities.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a quasi-experimental design, specifically the one-group pretest-posttest design (Sudaryono, 2021). This design was chosen to effectively measure the change in the level of inner child trauma within a single group of participants before and after a specific intervention. The core purpose of this design is to determine if a significant difference exists in the measured variable (inner child trauma) as a direct result of the intervention (traumatic counseling). This approach allows for a direct comparison of the participants' state before and after the counseling sessions, providing a strong basis for evaluating the intervention's effectiveness (Emzir, 2021; Sugiyono, 2023).

The study focused on the level of inner child trauma experienced by final-year female students at Universitas PGRI Argopuro Jember, measured both before and after they participated in traumatic counseling sessions that integrated writing therapy and a multicultural approach. Inner child trauma was defined as a psychological condition stemming from painful childhood experiences, characterized by symptoms such as feelings of not being loved, emotional rejection, excessive guilt, and perfectionism (Briere & Scott, 2022). The level of trauma was assessed using a validated inner child trauma questionnaire. The intervention, traumatic counseling, was a structured process aimed at healing childhood trauma, utilizing writing therapy to facilitate emotional expression and a multicultural

approach to acknowledge and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants (Yuliana et al., 2025). The indicators for inner child trauma, as adapted from Briere & Scott (2022), included emotional dysregulation, excessive guilt and shame, alexithymia, low self-esteem, and intrusive memories.

The study population consisted of female students enrolled in the Guidance and Counseling program at Universitas PGRI Argopuro Jember. The research was conducted on the university campus, with participants selected using purposive sampling. This technique was used to select six participants who met specific inclusion criteria: The criteria for inclusion are as follows: 1. Female students actively enrolled at PGRI Argopuro University in Jember, particularly those in their final year of study, 2. Have a moderate to high inner child trauma score based on the results of a pretest using a validated instrument, 3. Willing to participate in the entire series of traumatic counseling sessions over six full sessions, 4. Provide informed consent to participate in the research, 5. Able to express experiences or emotions in writing (writing therapy). This method ensured that the sample was highly relevant to the study's focus, maximizing the potential for observing a significant therapeutic effect (Sugiyono, 2023).

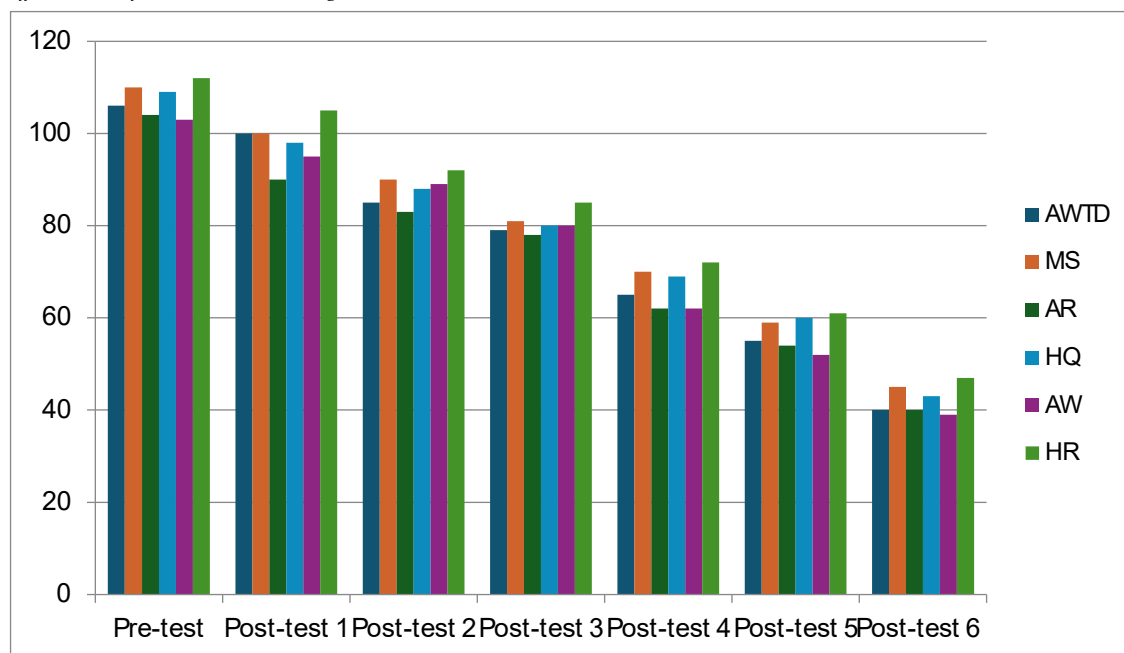
The research procedure was divided into three main stages. The pre-counseling stage involved administering a pretest in the form of a validated inner child trauma questionnaire to establish the baseline level of trauma for each participant. The intervention stage consisted of six structured traumatic counseling sessions, each lasting 60 minutes. These sessions incorporated writing therapy and a multicultural approach to help participants process their trauma. Finally, the post-counseling stage involved administering the same questionnaire as a posttest to measure any changes in the participants' inner child trauma levels after the intervention. The collected data was then analyzed using a paired-sample t-test to statistically compare the trauma scores before and after the counseling. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was set to determine if the observed differences were statistically significant (Emzir, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pre and Post-test Result

Table 1. Results

No	Name	Pre-test	Treatment					
			Post-test 1	Post-test 2	Post-test 3	Post-test 4	Post-test 5	Post-test 6
1.	AWTD	106	100	85	79	65	55	40
2.	MS	110	100	90	81	70	59	45
3.	AR	104	90	83	78	62	54	40
4.	HQ	109	98	88	80	69	60	43
5.	AW	103	95	89	80	62	52	39
6.	HR	112	105	92	85	72	61	47
Average		107,3	98	87,8	80,5	66,6	56,8	42,3
Category		Very High	Very High	High	High	Enough	Enough	Low



Picture 1. Pre-test and Post-test Comparison Chart

The post-test results in Table 1 show significant changes in the level of inner child trauma among female students after receiving traumatic counseling intervention. The pre-test results were in the very high category, post-test 1 results were in the very high category, post-test 2 results were in the high category, post-test 3 results were in the high category, post-test 4 results were in the moderate category, post-test 5 results were in the moderate category, and post-test 6 results were in the low category. The average post-test scores showed a substantial decrease from the pre-test conditions. The comparison of pre-test and post-test results indicated a decrease in scores, suggesting the high effectiveness of the intervention provided.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic for Pretest and Posttest

<i>Descriptive Statistic for Pretest and Posttest</i>			
Vaeiabel	N	Mean (M)	SD
Pretest	6	107.33	3.56
Posttest	6	42.33	3.20

The paired-sample t-test analysis showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest scores ($M = 107.33$, $SD = 3.56$) and posttest scores ($M = 42.33$, $SD = 3.20$), $t(5) = 178.01$, $p < .001$.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-test and Effect size

<i>Paired Sample t-test and Effect size</i>			
Vaeiabel	N	Mean (M)	SD
Pretest	6	107.33	3.56
Posttest	6	42.33	3.20

The effect size based on Cohen's $d = 72.67$, which indicates a very large intervention effect. Thus, writing therapy-based traumatic counseling has been proven effective in reducing inner child trauma in female students.

Reliability Analysis

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.834	29

The table shows the results of the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha statistics for the research instrument consisting of 29 items with a value of 0.834. Based on the results obtained, the value of 0.834 is greater than 0.60 ($p > 0.60$), indicating that the 29-item instrument has very good internal consistency, meaning that the items in the instrument are positively correlated and consistently measure the same construct, making it suitable and reliable for use in research data collection. Additionally, the results of the normality test can be seen in the following table:

Normality Test

Table 5. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Results

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	,945	6	,699
Post-test 1	,969	6	,887
Post-test 2	,966	6	,866
Post-test 3	,869	6	,221
Post-test 4	,892	6	,331
Post-test 5	,916	6	,477
Post-test 6	,904	6	,398

Based on the table above, the normality test results show that the pre-test data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.945 with a significance of 0.699, while the post-test 1 data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.969 with a significance of 0.887, and the post-test 2 data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.966 with a significance of 0.866. The post-test 3 data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.869 with a significance of 0.221. -Wilk value of 0.966 with a significance level of 0.866, post-test 3 data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.869 with a significance level of 0.221, post-test 4 data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.892 with a significance level of 0.331, post-test 5 data has a Shapiro -Wilk value of 0.916 with a significance level of 0.477, and post-test 6 data has a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.904 with a significance level of 0.398. All six significance levels are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data is normally distributed and meets the criteria for parametric testing. The results of the paired sample t-test can be seen in the following table:

Paired Sample T-test

Table 6. Paired Sample T-test Result

	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	95 % Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Lower	Upper			
Pair1 Post-test 1	6,24388	12,42279	7,766	5	,001
Pair 2 Post-test 2	16,62600	22,37400	17,441	5	,000
Pair 3 Post-test 3	24,49456	29,17211	29,493	5	,000
Pair 4 Post-test 4	39,80981	41,52353	122,000	5	,000
Pair 5 Post-test 5	49,62198	51,37802	147,849	5	,000
Pair 6 Post-test 6	64,06136	65,93864	178,010	5	,000

Based on the table above, the results of the paired sample t-test Pair 1 Post-test 1 show a t-value of 7.766 with 5 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.001. The results of the paired sample t-test Pair 2 Post-test 2 shows a t-value of 17.441 with 5 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000. The results of the paired sample t-test for Pair 3 Post-test 3 show a t-value of 29.493 with 5 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000. the results of the paired sample t-test for Pair 4 Post-test 4 showed a t-value of 122.000 with 5 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000, the results of the paired sample t-test for Pair 5 Post -test 5 shows a t-value of 147.849 with 5 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000, and the results of the paired sample t-test Pair 6 Post-test 6 show a t-value of 178.010 with 5 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.000. Since the significance level is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted, meaning there is a significant difference between the levels of inner child trauma among female students before and after receiving traumatic counseling intervention.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant effectiveness of traumatic counseling in reducing inner child trauma among female students. The substantial decrease in trauma scores from the pretest to the final posttest indicates that the structured six-session

intervention was highly successful. These results are consistent with findings that traumatic counseling successfully helps clients readapt to their environment, as the traumatic counseling process also involves the immediate environment, such as parents, siblings, and close relatives, by processing and resolving past trauma (Suryadi, 2024). The intervention's success can be attributed to its comprehensive design, which combined the therapeutic power of writing with a culturally sensitive approach. By engaging in writing therapy, participants were able to externalize and process deeply buried emotions, which is a crucial step in healing from inner child wounds (Aisyah et al., 2025; Khadijah & Zakky Abdul Ghoni, 2022). This process allowed them to confront their painful memories and reframe their narratives, moving from a position of victimhood to one of resilience and self-empowerment (Tasya Diandra Aulia et al., 2024).

The integration of a multicultural approach was a key factor in the intervention's success, particularly within the diverse student population at Universitas PGRI Argopuro Jember. This approach ensured that the counseling process was tailored to the individual's unique background, respecting their cultural values and personal history (Manurung & Rahmi, 2022). By validating their experiences within a cultural context, the counseling helped students acknowledge their identity and rebuild their self-confidence, which is often severely compromised by trauma (Nailul, 2022; Rahmah et al., 2024). The use of multicultural counseling helped dismantle negative stereotypes and fostered a sense of belonging, which is essential for social and personal adjustment after trauma (Gustama et al., 2025; Laulang et al., 2025). This holistic approach, which addressed not only the psychological but also the social and cultural dimensions of trauma, likely contributed to the sustained positive outcomes observed in the posttest scores.

A closer look at the results reveals that the intervention was particularly effective in addressing core symptoms of inner child trauma, such as emotional dysregulation, excessive guilt and shame, and low self-worth. The structured nature of the counseling sessions, which progressed from building a safe space to processing trauma and finally to integrating a new, more positive self-narrative, allowed participants to gradually develop healthier coping mechanisms. The writing tasks, such as writing a letter to their "little self" and guided journaling, provided a safe outlet for expressing emotions that had been suppressed for years. This process is instrumental in helping individuals identify and understand the root causes of their current emotional responses and maladaptive behaviors (Briere & Scott, 2022). The final sessions, focused on forgiveness and creating new narratives, empowered participants to move beyond their past and build a more hopeful future, directly addressing the low self-worth and persistent feelings of guilt that characterized their pre-intervention state.

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence that a structured traumatic counseling intervention combining writing therapy and a multicultural approach is a highly effective method for reducing inner child trauma in young female adults. The significant statistical difference between the pretest and posttest scores, coupled with the consistent improvement over the six sessions, confirms the efficacy of this therapeutic model. The findings not only validate the theoretical framework but also offer a practical, evidence-based model for university-based counseling services. The successful application of this model suggests that similar interventions could be widely adapted to support the mental health and well-being of other student populations, ultimately helping them to overcome the lasting effects of childhood trauma and thrive academically and personally.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the research conducted found that traumatic counseling interventions combined with writing therapy and a multicultural approach were highly effective in reducing childhood trauma among female students. The main finding, supported by a significant statistical difference between pretest and posttest scores ($p < 0.05$), demonstrates that the intervention successfully lowered the participants' trauma levels, particularly in areas of emotional regulation, guilt, and self-worth. However, a key limitation of this research is its

small sample size of six participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study used a one-group pretest-posttest design, which, while effective for this purpose, lacks a control group to fully isolate the effects of the intervention from other confounding variables. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to replicate this study with a larger and more diverse sample size to enhance the external validity of the results. Furthermore, incorporating a control group and conducting a longitudinal follow-up would provide a more robust understanding of the long-term effectiveness of this counseling model. The results of this study have important implications for various parties. For counselors, trauma-focused counseling based on writing therapy can serve as an effective intervention model to assist clients with inner child trauma. For universities, these findings underscore the need to strengthen campus counseling services that are sensitive to students' cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, for policymakers, these findings support the urgency of developing more comprehensive and adaptive mental health service policies in higher education institutions to address students' needs.

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