



The effectiveness of group counseling with the keeping diaries of events technique in reducing excessive dating app use among adolescents experiencing romantic breakups

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of group counseling using the Keeping Diaries of Events technique in reducing excessive dating app use among adolescents after experiencing a romantic breakup. The research employed a quantitative approach with a One-Group Pretest-Posttest design. Five participants were selected through purposive sampling based on predetermined criteria. Data were collected using a Likert-scale instrument, diary documentation, and observation sheets. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used as the inferential analysis technique to evaluate differences between pretest and posttest scores. The results showed a significance value of 0.043, indicating a meaningful decrease in excessive dating app use after the intervention. These findings suggest that group counseling combined with diary-based self-monitoring contributes to improved emotional awareness and behavioral regulation among adolescents following breakup-related distress.

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INTRODUCTION

Society was essentially a complex social system formed by interconnected individuals who interacted regularly (Darmadi et al., 2024). As a dynamic system, society continually experienced development, in which social structures that were once rigid and hierarchical had shifted into more flexible networks (Putra & Ananda, 2020). Within this macro-sociological context, adolescence was a crucial phase in the individual life cycle, marked by identity exploration, the formation of intense interpersonal relationships, and increased emotional capacity, aligned with the socialization process that transmitted values from one generation to the next (Santoso & Dewi, 2023).

The phenomena of globalization and the digital revolution had accelerated these changes, producing increasingly complex and flexible social relationships. These changes also contributed to individual development, especially during adolescence. In the Indonesian context, recent national surveys have indicated a notable rise in adolescent dating app engagement, with a proportion of users showing early signs of compulsive patterns, highlighting how serious and widespread the

issue has become. Such significant transformations in social structures and dynamics influenced how individuals interacted and sought emotional connections. Amid the vulnerability following a breakup one of the most significant stressors experienced by adolescents – dating apps emerged as a quick route to seek new connections, reflecting a shift in social norms within matchmaking practices (Iskandar & Jannah, 2022). Focusing specifically on adolescents who have recently experienced a breakup is essential because this group is at heightened risk of using dating apps as an emotional escape mechanism, making them more vulnerable to excessive and maladaptive patterns of use. International studies have shown that adolescent users of dating apps often experience online victimization and poor psychosocial conditions such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Huang et al., 2023). In addition, research on adult users showed that excessive (problematic) use of dating apps can be predicted and has the potential to become compulsive (Cruz et al., 2024), thus underlying the need for psychological interventions and usage regulation.

Excessive dating app use was defined as an intensive and compulsive pattern of engagement with the application, used as an escape mechanism from emotional pain, ultimately exceeding functional boundaries and resulting in significant negative impacts (Darmadi et al., 2024). This behavior occurred because adolescents tended to adopt an assessment mindset within environments involving excessive choices (choice overload), evaluating potential partners based on surface-level information, which ironically hindered the development of long-term intimacy.

Psychologically, compulsive dating app use after a breakup hindered a healthy emotional recovery process (grief process), in which adolescents tended to replace sadness with external validation or quick fixes derived from new matches (Suryani et al., 2021). Society's inability to adapt (as emphasized by Parsons, cited in Macionis) to rapid technological change was often not accompanied by adequate individual coping mechanisms. Therefore, systematic and structured guidance and counseling interventions were needed to help adolescents internalize their emotional experiences.

Group counseling offered an ideal supportive environment by utilizing collective identity that developed through interaction, generating a sense of togetherness among group members (Kurniawan & Amelia, 2020). This mechanism was aligned with symbolic interactionism, which emphasized that social interactions depended on subjective and collective meanings given by the individuals involved (Sari & Basuki, 2023). The synergistic effects of the group were expected to increase overall intervention effectiveness.

This study focused on the Keeping Diaries of Events technique, a modification of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach. This technique instructed clients to record in detail triggering events (A), irrational beliefs (B), and behavioral consequences (C), specifically those related to urges to use dating apps (Fauzi et al., 2022). Theoretically, this diary technique worked based on metacognitive principles. By documenting the event-belief-consequence sequence, adolescents were compelled to view their problems more objectively based on actual truth rather than personal bias (Hartono & Susanti, 2025). This structured and measured writing process encouraged improvements in rational capacity, which served as a crucial element in strengthening self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 2018).

A specific strength of the Keeping Diaries technique was its ability to reveal digital triggers and automatic behaviors. Diary writing became a powerful self-monitoring tool that transformed previously impulsive behaviors into deliberate actions (Anggraini & Rahmat, 2020). In addition, this technique aimed to reduce the dopamine-driven loop triggered by dating apps by shifting focus toward rewards from real-world activities, thereby helping individuals build healthier replacement behaviors (Aminah & Zuhri, 2021).

Several studies had demonstrated the effectiveness of diary-based techniques in reducing compulsive behaviors such as online gaming, as they enabled adolescents to view their problems as a series of manageable events rather than integral parts of their identity (Joko & Pratiwi, 2024). Certain outcomes of keeping a diary included improved self-awareness, positive self-

understanding, and the emergence of a sense of responsibility for excessive behaviors and the recovery process. Although literature supported diary techniques and group counseling, research specifically examining the combined effectiveness of Group Counseling with the Keeping Diaries of Events Technique in addressing Excessive Dating App Use among Adolescents Post-Breakup remained very limited in the national context. Most studies focused on general smartphone addiction rather than app-specific behaviors related to emotional coping after breakups (Rahayu & Bakri, 2020). Thus, a clear research gap exists in the absence of empirical studies that integrate CBT-based group counseling with the Keeping Diaries of Events technique to directly target excessive dating app use among adolescents post-breakup.

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design to objectively measure behavioral changes. This approach enabled statistical comparisons of behavioral scores (Nugroho et al., 2021). Therefore, the explicit objective of this research is to determine whether group counseling using the Keeping Diaries of Events technique significantly reduces excessive dating app use among adolescents post-breakup. The research problem is formulated as follows: *“Does the Keeping Diaries of Events-based group counseling intervention lead to a significant decrease in excessive dating app use among adolescents who have recently experienced a breakup?”*. Theoretically, this study was expected to enrich the body of knowledge in guidance and counseling, particularly within CBT-based group counseling adapted to the psychosocial challenges of adolescents in the digital era (Hasibuan & Naution, 2024). Practically, the findings of this study were expected to provide direct contributions to counseling practitioners (school counselors and counselors) by offering a statistically tested and structured intervention model to address issues related to dating apps and breakups. This intervention could be efficiently implemented in school environments or youth counseling centers (Mulyadi & Taufik, 2022).

Group counseling services, as a structured intervention, functioned as a healing mechanism through factors such as a sense of togetherness – realizing that one was not alone. This was highly effective for addressing symptoms of digital compulsive behavior because it reduced stigma and increased personal responsibility (self-accountability) through group agreements. The combination of group counseling and the Keeping Diaries of Events technique offered a comprehensive approach. The diary technique served as a cognitive restructuring tool by documenting emotions while avoiding the application and the duration of alternative offline activities, helping individuals identify triggering urges and develop healthier replacement behaviors (Fauzi et al., 2022). Based on the background that considered social dynamics, adolescent psychological challenges, and the identification of research gaps, this study aimed to empirically examine the effectiveness of Group Counseling Using the Keeping Diaries of Events Technique in significantly reducing Excessive Dating App Use Behavior among Adolescents Post-Breakup as research subjects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental research design. The selected design was the One-Group Pretest-Posttest model. The population of this study consisted of all adolescents (ages 10–24, according to BKKBN) at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra who were identified as having experienced a breakup and exhibited excessive behavior in using dating apps. The sampling technique was determined using Purposive Sampling (a non-probability sampling technique). Purposive sampling was a technique in which the sample was selected based on specific considerations or criteria that had been predetermined by the researchers (Ani et al., 2021). A total of five participants met the predetermined criteria and were included in the study. The small sample size was justified because the intervention required individual counseling sessions and the researcher faced procedural and time-related limitations, making a larger sample impractical and inconsistent with the study's focus.

The data collection techniques used were test instruments in the form of a Likert Scale to generate quantitative data related to behavioral levels, supported by Diaries of Events documentation (as evidence of the reflective process) and Observation Sheets (to monitor the implementation of the treatment). The inclusion criteria consisted of adolescents aged 18–24 who had recently experienced a breakup, actively used dating apps, and showed excessive usage behavior, while the exclusion criteria included individuals who were currently receiving psychological treatment or unable to participate consistently throughout the counseling sessions. The intervention procedure began with administering a pretest, followed by data processing to identify individuals who met the criteria; participants who were selected then received individual counseling sessions, and the process concluded with administering a posttest to determine whether behavioral changes occurred. Each counseling session lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted by one professionally trained counselor. The activity format followed a structured sequence consisting of an opening phase, exploration of issues, cognitive-behavioral processing using the diary technique, and a reflective closing session. The counseling sessions were facilitated by a counselor who possessed professional competencies and formal training in group counseling and behavior-based intervention techniques.

The collected data were analyzed using inferential statistics after the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was applied to examine differences in scores, in order to verify the effectiveness of the intervention. To maintain objectivity, the researcher used standardized instruments, adhered to structured procedures, and ensured that the data interpretation process was conducted independently without influencing participants' responses. Instrument validation and reliability testing were conducted by first developing the measurement instrument, followed by expert judgment to assess content suitability, and then field testing the instrument on a sample of 150 respondents to compute validity and reliability coefficients. The Diary of Events was analyzed through thematic coding by identifying recurring patterns, emotional expressions, behavioral triggers, and changes in self-reflection across entries to support the quantitative findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study was conducted at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra Medan with a focus on measuring the effectiveness of group counseling using the Keeping Diaries of Events technique in reducing excessive dating app use among adolescents. The research data were collected through the administration of a Pre-test and Post-test using a behavioral scale of dating app use, which was developed based on a Likert scale and had been tested for validity and reliability. The category interval boundaries (High, Moderate, Low) were determined using the ideal mean and ideal standard deviation formula commonly applied in Likert-based scales, ensuring that each interval accurately reflected the distribution and categorization of behavioral intensity. The Pre-test and Post-test results of dating app usage behavior were as follows:

Tabel 1. Frequency and percentage distribution of pre-test and post-test scores

<i>Pre-test</i>				<i>Post-test</i>			
Interval	F	Categ	%	Interval	F	Category	%
107-145	0	High	0	107-145	0	High	0
68-106	5	Medium	100	68-106	1	Medium	20
29-67	0	Low	0	29-67	4	Low	80
amount	5		100	amount	5		100

Based on the data analysis presented in Table 1 regarding the frequency and percentage distribution of Pre-test and Post-test scores, the following results were obtained. At the Pre-test stage, all five students were in the Moderate category with a percentage of 100%, while none were in the High or Low categories. After the intervention or treatment (assuming the presence of treatment between the Pre-test and Post-test), the Post-test results showed a change in distribution.

The frequency of students in the Moderate category was 1 student with a percentage of 20%. Meanwhile, the remaining 4 students, representing 80%, were in the Low category.

Regarding participation, four of the five participants engaged fully and consistently in all group counseling sessions and completed the required diary entries. Meanwhile, one participant demonstrated partial participation, occasionally arriving late, missing one session, and submitting incomplete diary reflections. This inconsistency contributed to the reduced impact of the intervention for that individual, as full engagement was essential for developing reflective habits and practicing behavioral regulation techniques taught during the sessions.

However, one participant did not experience a significant decline in dating app use, remaining in the Moderate category during the Post-test. Further examination of diary entries and observation notes indicated that this participant exhibited inconsistent emotional reflection, frequently skipped daily recording, and faced ongoing external stressors such as academic load and unresolved interpersonal conflict. These factors weakened the effectiveness of self-monitoring and limited the participant's ability to fully internalize the behavioral change strategies, explaining why the decrease in usage was not as substantial as in the other four participants.

Based on the presented data, there was an indication of a decrease in excessive dating app use in the group that received the intervention (Post-test). A significant change was shown by the shift of the majority of subjects from the Moderate category (100% in the Pre-test) to the Low category (80% in the Post-test), these category shifts further demonstrate that the interval boundaries accurately captured behavioral differences and were sensitive to intervention-related change. To ensure that this change was statistically significant and not merely coincidental, further analysis using comparative statistical testing was required. The results of this analysis were presented and discussed in the following Table 2.

Tabel 2. Wilcoxon test result

	Post test- Pre test
Z	-2,023
Asymp.Sig.(2-tailed)	,043

Based on the statistical results in Table 2, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to measure the difference between Pre-test and Post-test scores after group counseling using the Keeping Diaries of Events technique. The obtained Z value of -2.023 indicated a significant directional change from the Pre-test to the Post-test scores. Meanwhile, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.043, which was smaller than the significance level of 0.05, indicated that the difference was statistically significant. This meant that there was a meaningful change in excessive dating app use among adolescents following a romantic breakup after participating in group counseling, thus concluding that the intervention using the Keeping Diaries of Events technique had a significant effect in reducing excessive dating app use. This strengthened the assumption that the Keeping Diaries of Events technique was effective in helping adolescents become more aware of their dating app usage patterns, reflect on the negative impacts of excessive use, and develop healthier coping mechanisms in dealing with breakups.

Based on these results, the psychological mechanism underlying the behavioral improvement was closely related to increased self-awareness and emotional regulation. The decline in dating app use was strongly supported by participants' diary entries, which demonstrated reductions in impulsive urges, more adaptive emotional labeling, and improved ability to pause before engaging in excessive browsing. The Pre-test and Post-test score shifts reflected changes in cognitive-emotional processing, where participants increasingly identified internal triggers such as loneliness and rumination, and gradually replaced avoidance behaviors with reflective strategies introduced in the counseling sessions. This suggested that the intervention worked through cognitive restructuring, emotional ventilation, and strengthening self-monitoring capacities.

Thus, the psychological mechanisms observed in this study were aligned with the theoretical functions of journaling-based interventions: facilitating emotional catharsis, reducing avoidance behaviors, improving metacognitive awareness, and strengthening coping strategies. The quantitative shift from Moderate to Low categories corresponded with qualitative improvements in emotional articulation and reduced dependency on digital platforms as escape mechanisms. The exception of one participant further emphasized that the effectiveness of the technique depended heavily on consistent engagement, openness to reflection, and environmental support.

The method of recording events in a diary had empirical evidence that showed its effectiveness in managing stress and regulating emotions. A study by (Fang et al., 2021) related to medical workers during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that recording daily experiences in a diary served as a means of achieving catharsis and psychological reflection. This activity gave individuals the opportunity to express negative emotions such as anxiety and fear in a safe space, thereby supporting the processing of traumatic events and reducing psychological stress. In the context of this study, adolescents who experienced romantic breakups were often accompanied by waves of negative emotions such as sadness, rejection, and loneliness, which they then attempted to avoid through maladaptive behaviors such as excessive use of dating applications. Through the use of the diary technique, participants were encouraged to process and reflect on these emotions positively, so it was expected to reduce the tendency to seek escape through the use of dating applications as a form of emotional avoidance.

Furthermore, the additional benefit of this method in a group context was based on the study by (Tissenbaum et al., 2021) which created a collaborative journal model by utilizing augmented reality technology in education. The study showed that documenting and reflecting on events together could deepen understanding, standardize experiences, and strengthen social learning. When applied in group counseling, this collaborative dynamic provided adolescents who had experienced breakups with the opportunity to share their experiences and reflections from their diaries. Through this sharing process, participants realized that their feelings and struggles were common and also experienced by others (universalization), thereby indirectly reducing feelings of loneliness and shame. This peer social support produced a system of accountability and another source of validation, which was a function often mistakenly sought by adolescents through dating applications. Therefore, group counseling that used the diary method did not only focus on individual aspects but also utilized the potential of the group to encourage adaptive behavior.

Not only functioning in emotional and social aspects, another dimension of the effectiveness of this method lay in its ability as a self-monitoring tool. The findings of (Farnum et al., 2022) used the diary of events as a method to monitor changes in attitudes and behaviors in an environmental peacebuilding project. This method allowed direct documentation of triggers, responses, and consequences of a behavior. In the proposed intervention, adolescents were taught to regularly write down triggers that caused them to use dating applications, such as feelings of boredom or seeing a picture of an ex, along with the duration of use and the emotions before and after. This recording process increased their self-awareness regarding compulsive behavior patterns that had previously operated automatically. This awareness was the first important step in behavioral change because by understanding the pattern, individuals became more capable of intervening and managing the urge rather than following it impulsively.

The technique of recording events in the context of group counseling was proposed to be effective in reducing excessive dating application use among adolescents who experienced breakups by addressing the root problems comprehensively. This method focused on the emotional aspect by providing a channel for catharsis, the social aspect through support and normalization within the group, and the behavioral aspect with self-monitoring mechanisms that strengthened self-control. In other words, the application of this technique in group counseling

made it a comprehensive intervention with strong potential to create sustainable behavioral change.

Practically, the technique of recording events in the form of a diary had long been used as a psychological intervention strategy to help individuals manage emotions and recognize daily behavioral patterns. Through routine journaling, participants were able to engage in deeper self-reflection, enabling them to better understand the emotional and behavioral conditions they experienced. This aligned with the findings of (Maharani & Putra, 2021), which showed that consistent diary writing could enhance adolescents' emotional regulation abilities because it provided a safe space to express personal experiences and reinterpret events they encountered. In the context of group counseling for adolescents who experienced breakups, this technique helped them realize their excessive dating app usage patterns and fostered internal motivation to reduce such behavior.

Moreover, the effectiveness of daily recording in modifying digital behavior was also reinforced by the study of (Ramadhani & Sari, 2022), which found that self-monitoring strategies through daily journaling were proven to reduce addictive digital media behaviors in adolescents. Through the process of recording and reassessing daily activities, individuals became more sensitive to impulsive behaviors and more capable of controlling the urge to use applications excessively. These findings were highly relevant to the use of the Keeping Diaries of Events technique in group counseling, in which participants not only recorded important events but also evaluated thoughts and feelings that accompanied their dating application use. Thus, this technique could serve as an effective approach in reducing the tendency toward excessive dating app use among adolescents after breakups because it encouraged self-awareness, reflection, and gradual behavioral change.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the sample size was small (N=5), which limits generalizability and statistical power despite the large effect size. Second, the study relied on self-reported diary entries, which may be influenced by participant bias or inconsistent recording habits. Third, external factors such as academic stress or interpersonal conflict could not be fully controlled and may have influenced the outcomes. These limitations suggest caution in interpreting the results and indicate the need for future studies with larger samples, mixed methods, and longitudinal follow-up.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that group counseling using the Keeping Diaries of Events technique was effective in reducing excessive dating app use among adolescents after a breakup. Behavioral scores decreased from Moderate to mostly Low categories, supported by a Wilcoxon significance value of 0.043. The diary process enabled participants to identify emotional triggers, evaluate irrational thoughts, and develop healthier coping strategies, while the group setting offered motivation and shared accountability. Theoretically, the findings reinforce the relevance of CBT principles, especially self-monitoring and cognitive restructuring, in addressing technology-related compulsive behavior. Add practical implications and recommendations for further research. Practically, this intervention can be applied in schools or youth counseling services as a low-cost and structured program for managing problematic digital behavior. However, the small sample size and lack of a control group limit generalizability. Future studies should use larger samples, experimental designs, and follow-up assessments to strengthen empirical validity.

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