

EFFECTIVENESS OF SPIRITUAL EMOTIONAL FREEDOM TECHNIQUE (SEFT) THERAPY ON MENTAL HEALTH IN ADOLESCENTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Mental health is influenced by the balance of psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects. One emerging spiritual-based non-pharmacological intervention is the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT), a tapping technique on energy points accompanied by affirmations and prayers. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of SEFT on stress, anxiety, and depression. The method used was a systematic literature review of articles published between 2021 and 2025 in the Scopus and Google Scholar databases, with human populations and quantitative outcomes. The literature search was conducted using a combination of keywords in Indonesian (SEFT, stress, anxiety, depression, mental health) and English (SEFT, stress, anxiety, depression, mental health). Of the 16,712 identified articles, a selection process was conducted based on the 2020 PRISMA guidelines through the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Five articles met the inclusion criteria for review and critical analysis. The results showed that most studies reported significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and/or depression after the SEFT intervention, using instruments such as the DASS-21, HADS, and PSS. SEFT has the potential to be a non-pharmacological spiritual intervention to support psychological well-being and holistic nursing practice, although large-scale RCTs with more robust methodological designs are needed.

Keywords: *SEFT, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Mental Health*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent health is a significant global challenge as approximately 1.3 billion adolescents, equivalent to 16% of the world's population, face multiple complex and multidimensional health risks (World Health Organization, 2024). Today, the most frequently discussed adolescent health issue is mental health with approximately one in seven global adolescents aged 10-19 years experiencing a mental health disorder that accounts for about 15% of the total burden of disease in this age group (World Health Organization, 2025). Nationally, this issue has also become a concern, with the results of a survey conducted by the I-NAMHS (Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey) in 2022 showing that as many as 15.5 million, or around 34.9% of adolescents, experience mental health problems (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2024). Not only that, the Indonesian Health Survey 2023, also noted that 2.0% of the population aged ≥ 15 years experienced mental health problems, 1.4% experienced depression, and 0.25% had thoughts of ending their lives with the rate in women reaching 0.33% higher than men at 0.17% (Kementerian Kesehatan Republik Indonesia, 2023). Relevant research also shows that adolescent girls are more vulnerable to psychological stress rooted in environmental instability, lack of social support, and lack of knowledge about their own bodies (Rahmy & Muslimahayati, 2021). Terminologically, mental health disorders can be defined as conditions that affect the cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of an individual. This condition is related to dysfunction of the central nervous system, which disrupts a person's emotional regulation and behavioral control (Fadillah, 2024). Global prevalence shows that approximately 4.4% of the world's population experiences depression, while another 3.6% suffer from anxiety disorders (Chaudhari et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the prevalence of mental health disorders is estimated to reach 20% of the population, with millions of individuals living with depression, anxiety, and other emotional disorders (Subchi et al., 2022). This high figure emphasizes that mental health issues are not only clinical issues but also social phenomena that require a comprehensive, evidence-based approach.

The impact of mental health disorders in adolescents includes impaired emotional, cognitive, and behavioral functioning, characterized by less satisfying social relationships with peers, the emergence of disruptive behavior, and decreased academic achievement, which cumulatively increase vulnerability in adulthood and have negative implications for well-being throughout life (Lin & Guo, 2024). The broad impact on various aspects of life creates an urgent need for adolescents to obtain effective recovery strategies. When faced with this condition, some individuals try to heal themselves, but often do not achieve significant progress. The low effectiveness of these efforts is often caused by complex barriers, such as internalized social stigma, intrapersonal conflict, and cognitive distortions about oneself, which collectively hinder therapeutic progress despite the individual's motivation and efforts (Yüksel et al., 2025). This disorder has a multifaceted impact on holistic well-being, including decreased functional capacity in the occupational domain, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, and limitations in social participation. Therefore, structured, evidence-based interventions are needed to neutralize these inhibiting factors and optimize long-term recovery trajectories. One non-pharmacological approach that is gaining attention in this context is the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT).

Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) is a form of therapy within energy psychology, a discipline that focuses on the relationship between the body's energy system and psychological well-being. This approach has been proven effective in helping address various physical and psychological issues (Nuroh, 2022). According to Zainuddin (2009), SEFT is classified as a mind-body therapy that combines the principles of energy medicine with a spiritual approach through the tapping method at certain energy points along the body's twelve energy meridian lines. The spiritual element in SEFT is manifested through prayers or religious affirmations that are recited from the beginning to the end of the therapy session. This therapy is universal, meaning it can be applied by anyone, regardless of religious background or beliefs (Rizkiana & Mulianda, 2021). Several studies have also shown that SEFT is effective in reducing anxiety levels and increasing individual motivation (Rachmanto & Pohan, 2021).

According to Zainuddin (2009), procedurally, the implementation of SEFT consists of three main stages, namely set-up, tune-in, and tapping (Annuar, 2022). The setup stage aims to neutralize psychological barriers (psychological reversal) that can disrupt the body's energy flow, through affirmations or prayers that express surrender to God, for example "O God, even though I experience..., I sincerely and completely surrender to You". Next, the tune-in stage is done by directing focus on a specific negative event or emotion while saying religious affirmations such as "I am sincere, I surrender to You, O God". The final stage, tapping, is done by lightly tapping with the fingertips on the body's energy points, such as the brow area, under the eyes, collarbone and sides of the hands, while maintaining focus and positive affirmations.

Based on the SEFT mechanism that integrates psychological and spiritual aspects, this study aims to examine empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) in improving adolescent mental health, particularly in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression levels. To achieve these objectives, this systematic literature review seeks to answer the research questions: (1) How effective is the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) in reducing levels of stress, anxiety, and depression in adolescents? This study is expected to provide scientific contributions in strengthening the theoretical and empirical basis for the application of SEFT as a spiritually based non-pharmacological intervention in nursing practice, as well as being a practical reference for health workers in implementing holistic and contextual adolescent mental recovery strategies in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review critically synthesizes previous research on the effectiveness of the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) in improving adolescent mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. It outlines key findings and methodological insights that support SEFT as a holistic, evidence-based therapeutic approach. The analysis applies the PICO framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) to ensure a structured evaluation: Population refers to adolescents or students with psychological symptoms; Intervention is SEFT therapy; Comparison involves pre-post treatment or control groups; and Outcome denotes reductions in stress, anxiety, or depression. Using this framework, the review systematically identifies patterns, measures intervention effectiveness, and formulates implications for nursing and mental health practice.

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Table 1. Literature Review Results on the Effect of SEFT on Mental Health

No	Researcher	Title	Sample	Method	Result	PICO Analysis
1	Indah Roziah Cholilah (2023)	Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) Therapy in Reducing Student Anxiety Levels	Islamic Psychology Study Program students from the 2018–2020 intake, male and female, who experienced anxiety	This study used a quantitative technique with a quasi-experimental type. In this design, only one group will be given treatment, but pre- and post-tests were previously conducted to see the difference as the effect of the treatment in this case the SEFT intervention. The data analysis technique used a non-parametric statistical test Wilcoxon signed rank test Mann-Whitney U test with the help of the SPSS 20.0 for Windows program to compare the differences in pre-test and post-test scores, so that the effectiveness of SEFT Therapy can be known on student anxiety.	The results of statistical processing of the t-test with SPSS showed that the average pre-test anxiety score in the research subjects was 32.73, while the average post-test score was 19.57. This shows a mean difference of 13.16, which means there was a lower decrease in the post-test score. The mean difference is statistically significant with the t-test score. Based on the above conclusions, H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted. It can be concluded that Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) Therapy training is quite effective in reducing anxiety in psychology students.	P: Male and female Islamic Psychology students from the 2018–2020 intake who experienced anxiety. I: Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy. C: No control group; comparisons were made between pre-test and post-test scores (before and after the intervention). O: Decreased anxiety levels, with a mean pre-test score of 32.73 to a post-test score of 19.57; a statistically significant difference.
2	Rizki Maulana Hidayatullah, Finanin Nur Indiana (2024)	Terapi Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) untuk Penanganan Gangguan Neurotik	The sample in this study was taken using a total sampling technique, where the entire population of 10th-grade female students with neurotic disorders served	The research design is One Group Pretest-Posttest, which is one type of design in pre-experimental experimental research.	Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy has been proven effective in reducing neuroticism levels in tenth-grade female students at Ibrahimy 2 High School, Sukorejo, who experienced neurotic disorders.	P: All 10th-grade female students at Ibrahimy 2 High School, Sukorejo, who experienced neurotic disorders. I: Spiritual Emotional Freedom

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			as the research sample.	Ibrahimi 2 High School, Sukorejo. The results of this study showed a significant decrease in neuroticism levels after SEFT therapy, as evidenced by a t-value of 18.79 and a very small p-value (0.000). Thus, SEFT can be recommended as an effective intervention to reduce neurotic disorders in this population.	Technique (SEFT) therapy. C: No control group; comparisons were made between pre-test and post-test scores. O: A significant decrease in neurotic disorder levels, evidenced by a t-value of 18.79 and p-value of 0.000.	
3	Iwan Samsugito, Syukma Rhamadani Faizal Nur, Catur Permata sari (2024)	Description of the Application of Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) on Anxiety in Adolescents Who Do Early Marriage	The sample in this study was drawn using a total sampling technique, where the entire population of 10th-grade female students with neurotic disorders served as the research sample. The number of respondents was 5 (focused on wives) who had early marriages in the Air Putih sub-district. Respondents' anxiety levels were measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS).	The research design used in this study is descriptive with a case study approach.	Based on the measurement results, four respondents experienced moderate anxiety and one experienced severe anxiety, expressing irritability, anger, restless sleep, difficulty concentrating, and muscle pain. After three SEFT sessions, anxiety levels decreased, with three respondents experiencing mild anxiety and two respondents experiencing moderate anxiety.	P: Teenagers engaged in early marriage in Air Putih Village, focusing on 5 wives. I: Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy, 3 sessions. C: No control group; comparisons were made before and after the intervention (pre-post). O: Decreased anxiety levels; 3 respondents experienced mild anxiety and 2 respondents experienced moderate anxiety after SEFT.
4	Eka Wahyu Ayuningtiasa, Yanto, Berru	Penerapan Spiritual Emotional	In single-subject research, participants are	The approach used in this research is a	The data processing results showed a	P: 72 tenth-grade students of SMA N 9 Tebo.

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Amalianitac (2025)	Freedom Technique (SEFT) Untuk Mereduksi Kecemasan Siswa dalam Belajar	typically individuals, although small groups can also be involved, with each intervention yielding a single score for each measure. The population of this study was 72 10th-grade students at SMA N 9 Tebo.	quantitative experiment of the Single Subject Research (SSR) type with an A-B-A design. Single Subject Research is characterized as an experimental methodology.	significance level of 0.00, indicating that the application of the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) using a Single Subject Research (SSR) A-B-A design.	I: Implementation of the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) using a Single Subject Research (SSR) A-B-A design. C: Comparison of anxiety scores before (A) and after (B) the SEFT intervention, as well as follow-up measurements (A). O: Statistically significant decrease in learning anxiety levels ($p = 0.00$).	
5	Lutvi Linta Qolbi, Nuriyah Yuliana, Estiningtyas (2024)	Pengaruh Terapi Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) terhadap Penurunan Kecemasan pada Mahasiswa Tingkat Akhir	The population in this study was 72 final-year students writing their theses. Using the Slovin formula, 20 respondents were obtained. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling.	This research is a quantitative study, using a pre-experimental research design with a one-group pre-post-test approach. The study was conducted at a university in Karanganyar from March to April 2023.	The results of the Paired Sample T-test analysis showed a t-value of 25.812, while the P-value was <0.001 . The P-value was less than 0.05. This indicates that SEFT therapy significantly reduced anxiety in final-year students at Mitra Husada Karanganyar Health College.	P: Final-year students writing their theses at a university in Karanganyar, 20 respondents (purposive sampling). I: Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) therapy. C: Anxiety scores before and after SEFT implementation (one-group pre-post-test design). O: Significant decrease in anxiety in final-year students (P-value <0.001).

METHOD

This study used a literature review approach to examine the effectiveness of the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) on mental health in adolescents. This approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive overview

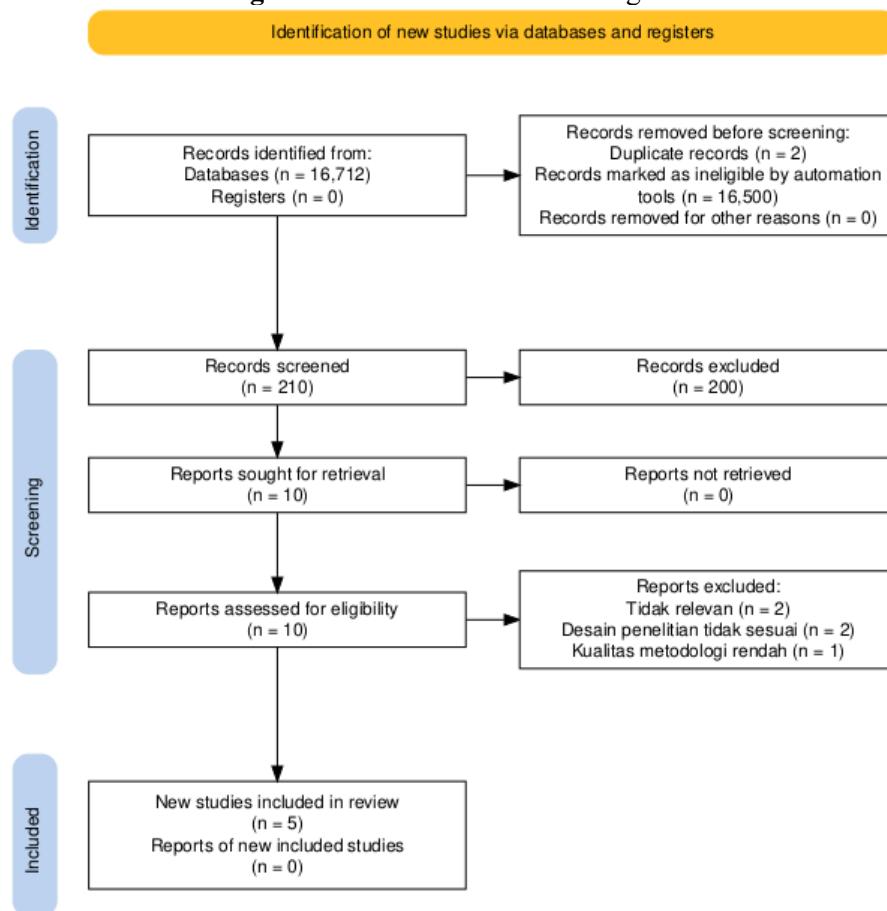
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of previous research results and to identify consistency in findings related to the influence of SEFT on psychological aspects such as stress, anxiety, depression, and mental well-being. The literature search was conducted through two main databases, Google Scholar and ScienceDirect, using a combination of keywords in Indonesian and English. The keywords used included: "SEFT, stress, anxiety, depression, mental health" and "SEFT, stress, anxiety, depression, mental health". Inclusion criteria included articles written in Indonesian or English, published between 2021 and 2025, available in full text, and relevant to the context of nursing and adolescent mental health. Conversely, non-scientific articles, proceedings, editorials, and publications with low methodological quality were excluded from the analysis.

Of the total 16,712 identified articles (Google Scholar = 16,700; ScienceDirect = 12), a multi-step selection process was conducted following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The selection process included identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. After a rigorous selection process, five articles met all inclusion criteria for further analysis. The excluded articles included studies irrelevant to the focus of SEFT on adolescents ($n = 2$), inappropriate research designs ($n = 2$), and low methodological quality ($n = 1$). The final results of the literature selection were then analyzed descriptively to assess the effectiveness of SEFT in supporting adolescent mental health. The complete flow of this selection process is shown visually in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flowchart Diagram



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) is a non-pharmacological intervention that integrates tapping techniques on the body's energy points, as in the acupressure approach, with spiritual dimensions such as prayer and affirmations that function to balance an individual's emotional state. Several recent studies have shown that SEFT has significant effectiveness in reducing symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression in adolescents and college students. Research conducted by Cholilah (2023), reported that the application of SEFT to students in the Islamic Psychology Study Program showed a statistically significant decrease in anxiety levels ($t=9.625$; $p<0.001$). The average anxiety score decreased from 32.73 to 19.57 after five SEFT intervention sessions, indicating the effectiveness of this therapy in reducing anxiety. These results are consistent with a systematic review by Choi et al.

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(2025), which stated that Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), as the basis for developing SEFT, showed consistent effectiveness in reducing anxiety symptoms compared to a control group without intervention. Thus, SEFT can be seen as an effective spiritual-based therapeutic approach in reducing anxiety levels in adolescents and college students.

Hidayatullah & Indiana, (2024) conducted a study on the effectiveness of Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) on high school students with neurotic symptoms including anxiety and depression. The study used a pre-posttest design without a control group, with results showing a significant decrease in neurotic scores after the SEFT intervention. The paired t-test yielded a t-value of 18.79 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a significant difference between pre- and post-therapy conditions. The mean neurotic score decreased from 53.54 to 43.29 after the intervention, thus concluding that SEFT was effective in reducing neurotic symptoms in the study participants. These findings align with the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Seok & Kim (2024) which reported that Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) significantly reduced depressive symptoms, especially in group interventions and moderate levels of depression. Based on these results, SEFT can be viewed as an effective non-pharmacological therapeutic approach in reducing anxiety and mild to moderate depressive symptoms in adolescents.

A study conducted by Samsugito et al. (2024), on the application of the Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) to five adolescent girls undergoing early marriages showed a decrease in anxiety levels after the intervention. Before therapy, four participants were in the moderate anxiety category and one participant in the severe anxiety category. After three SEFT therapy sessions, three participants experienced a decrease in mild anxiety levels, while the other two participants were in the moderate anxiety level. These results indicate an improvement in the emotional state of all participants, confirming that SEFT is effective in reducing adolescent anxiety levels, including in specific stressful situations such as early marriage. These findings align with the theory of SEFT's working mechanism, which explains that stimulating energy points through tapping techniques accompanied by spiritual affirmations can help balance the body's energy system, release emotional blocks, and increase an individual's psychological calm. Thus, SEFT can act as a holistic intervention that supports adolescent mental well-being through a synergy between psychological and spiritual aspects.

The study conducted by Ayuningtias et al. (2025), used a Single Subject Research (SSR) design with an A-B-A pattern on three high school students with high levels of learning anxiety. The results showed a decrease in learning anxiety levels after three sessions of Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) intervention in all participants. Anxiety scores based on the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21) instrument decreased to the normal category (score 1) at the post-intervention stage. The results of statistical analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test showed a significance value of $p = 0.000$ with Negative Ranks = 3, which indicated a significant difference between conditions before and after the intervention. These findings strengthen the evidence that SEFT contributes significantly to reducing academic anxiety levels in students.

The findings of Qolbi et al. (2024), reinforce the empirical evidence that SEFT is an effective intervention to reduce psychological distress among university students experiencing academic pressure. The study, which involved 20 final-year students, demonstrated a significant decrease in anxiety levels ($p < 0.001$) following the SEFT intervention. This result is consistent with international studies, such as the meta-analysis conducted by (Seok & Kim, 2024), which reported that interventions similar to SEFT or EFT significantly reduced depressive symptoms across 18 randomized controlled trials. In addition, research by Fitriasari et al. (2024), showed that four sessions of EFT effectively decreased academic stress and anxiety among nursing students ($p = 0.000$). These findings indicate that spiritual-based tapping techniques, including SEFT, can help regulate the autonomic nervous system and enhance psychological resilience through mind-body integration. Thus, SEFT may be considered a complementary and evidence-based therapeutic approach for managing anxiety in academic and clinical settings, particularly among youth populations.

Overall, the results of various studies analyzed indicate that Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) is an effective non-pharmacological intervention in reducing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression in adolescents and college students. The application of SEFT has been shown to have a positive impact on emotional balance and psychological stability through the mechanism of stimulating the body's energy points accompanied by spiritual components such as prayer and positive affirmations. The effectiveness of SEFT is consistently seen in various contexts, including academic anxiety, stress due to social pressure, and other emotional disorders commonly experienced by adolescents. The integration of psychological and spiritual aspects in SEFT makes it a relevant form of holistic therapy for application in nursing practice and mental health promotion. Thus, SEFT can be recommended as an alternative therapeutic approach that supports the comprehensive improvement of adolescent mental well-being. However, further research with a robust experimental design and a larger sample size is still needed to

strengthen empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness and working mechanisms of SEFT in the context of spiritual-based mental health interventions. Thus, the research results analyzed as a whole strengthen the empirical evidence that SEFT is effective in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression in adolescents in accordance with the objectives of this study. Future research is recommended to use an experimental design with a larger sample size to strengthen evidence of SEFT's effectiveness. Nursing practitioners can utilize SEFT as a non-pharmacological intervention in adolescent mental health services, while educational institutions are encouraged to integrate it into spiritual-based mental health promotion programs.

CONCLUSION

Based on a literature review, Spiritual Emotional Freedom Technique (SEFT) has been shown to be effective as a non-pharmacological intervention in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression in adolescents. This approach works through stimulation of the body's energy points, accompanied by affirmations and prayers, thereby balancing an individual's psychological and spiritual aspects. In general, SEFT can be viewed as a holistic therapy that supports improving adolescent mental well-being and has the potential to be integrated into spiritual-based nursing practice.

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