

HOUSE-TREE-PERSON ART DRAWING WORKSHOP TO IMPROVE FAMILY EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND REDUCE DIVORCE RISK

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Abstract

This community service program was conducted on October 25, 2025, in Kepenuhan Hulu Village, Rokan Hulu Regency, with the participation of 20 village cadres. The program aimed to strengthen family emotional awareness and reduce the risk of marital conflict by introducing the House-Tree-Person (HTP) art-drawing technique as a reflective tool. Using a workshop format, participants engaged in guided drawing activities, small-group discussions, and facilitator-led reflections to explore emotional dynamics within family relationships. Pre- and post-session reflections were used to assess changes in participants' understanding of emotional expression and early signs of family stress. The workshop results indicated that participants showed increased awareness of emotional cues, improved confidence in using the HTP method for community counseling, and enhanced skills in identifying potential indicators of marital strain. Participants also reported that the method was practical, culturally adaptable, and suitable for use in village-level family guidance programs. This community service activity demonstrates that creative and expressive techniques such as HTP drawing can serve as effective early-intervention tools to support family well-being and reduce the risk of divorce in rural communities.

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Introduction

Family emotional well-being plays an essential role in maintaining marital stability, especially in communities where access to counseling and mental-health services is limited. Emotional stress, unexpressed conflict, and ineffective communication are key predictors of marital strain and separation (Choudary, Khan & Atta, 2024; Hafeez, Loona & Nawaz, 2025; Macía et al., 2025). In rural areas such as Kepenuhan Hulu Village, the absence of structured emotional-support programs often exacerbates these risks, making community-based preventive efforts increasingly urgent. Recent studies in Indonesia also show growing concern regarding emotional distress in families and the need for practical tools to support early intervention (Waryanti, 2023).

In the last few years, expressive arts interventions have gained global and national recognition for their ability to facilitate emotional expression in a non-threatening way. Art therapy is widely used to externalize feelings that may be difficult to articulate verbally, providing a channel for self-reflection and emotional regulation (Hassan & Syazwan, 2022; Sahai & Tiwari, 2025; Arjona & Van Lith, 2025). Evidence from recent research highlights that drawing-based interventions can help individuals identify hidden emotional patterns, reduce stress, and communicate more authentically with others (Fabris, 2023; Putri et al., 2024; An, 2025). These findings suggest that art-based methods may be relevant for family-strengthening efforts, particularly in preventing unresolved emotional tension from escalating into marital conflict.

A 2024 meta-analysis demonstrated that art therapy significantly reduces anxiety in children and adolescents across multiple randomized controlled trials, supporting the effectiveness of drawing-based emotional interventions (Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Beyond anxiety reduction, art therapy has also been shown to decrease emotional trauma in adolescents from broken-home families, illustrating its role in addressing deep emotional wounds related to family conflict (Syam et al., 2023; Ward et al., 2025; Mardiansyah et al., 2025). Although these studies focus on youth populations, the underlying principle—that visual expression promotes emotional clarity—can be applied to family relationships more broadly.

Other emerging evidence indicates that art therapy may improve emotion management in general populations. For example, anger-reduction interventions using drawing techniques among junior high school students demonstrated significant improvements in emotional control (Akan, 2021; Astuti, 2024; Wang et al., 2025; Liu, Chen & Li, 2025). Similarly, drawing-based therapy has been used effectively in clinical mental-health settings, including patients experiencing perceptual disturbances, suggesting that expressive drawing remains adaptable across a wide spectrum of psychological needs (Galassi et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2024; Lyu, Ouyang & Zhang, 2025). These findings reinforce the versatility and accessibility of drawing-based reflective activities.

Within the Indonesian cultural context, art therapy has recently been recognized as a promising medium for supporting mental well-being, especially when

verbal disclosure is culturally difficult or socially stigmatized (Waryanti, 2023). Many communities still regard family issues as private, making emotional expression challenging. Therefore, using nonverbal, projective techniques such as the House-Tree-Person (HTP) drawing method may help families explore emotions safely. The HTP technique, although traditionally used for assessment, can function as a structured reflective tool that encourages individuals to connect emotions with family experiences.

Considering these recent developments, integrating HTP drawing into community empowerment offers a practical and culturally relevant approach. Village cadres – who serve as frontline community workers – are well-positioned to facilitate early emotional guidance. When trained in expressive drawing methods, cadres can help families identify emotional stressors before they develop into chronic conflict or divorce. This aligns with current recommendations for strengthening informal, community-based emotional support in rural Indonesian environments (Hassan & Syazwan, 2022).

Therefore, the present community service program titled “House-Tree-Person Art Drawing Workshop as a Family Emotional Reflection to Reduce the Risk of Divorce” was designed to introduce village cadres to the HTP method as a practical tool for emotional reflection. This introduction outlines the theoretical basis and recent empirical support for expressive drawing in mental-health promotion, establishing the relevance of this workshop as a preventive strategy for family well-being in Kepenuhan Hulu Village.

Method

This community service activity used a qualitative descriptive method to document the process, participant experiences, and perceived usefulness of the House-Tree-Person (HTP) art drawing workshop for emotional reflection. Qualitative approaches are particularly effective for capturing subjective meanings, emotional responses, and participant interpretations during art-based interventions (Archibald & Blines, 2021; Syam et al., 2023; Harasym et al., 2024; Simons et al., 2025). Because the goal of the program was to enhance family emotional awareness rather than to test hypotheses, this method provided rich narrative insights aligned with community-based empowerment principles.

Participants

The workshop was conducted on 25 October 2025 in Kepenuhan Hulu Village, Rokan Hulu Regency, and involved 20 village cadres. Village cadres were selected because they serve as frontline community workers who routinely interact with families and are responsible for early detection of social and emotional issues. Consistent with recent recommendations for community engagement, cadres are recognized as effective partners for disseminating mental-health interventions in rural communities (Naslund et al., 2021; Hassan & Syazwan, 2022; Russell et al., 2023;

[Chutiyami et al., 2025](#)). Participation was voluntary, and all individuals provided oral consent before the program began.

Procedure

The activity consisted of three main stages: (1) introduction to family emotional dynamics, (2) training in the HTP drawing technique, and (3) guided emotional reflection. The HTP method was chosen due to its established role as a projective drawing technique that allows individuals to externalize internal emotions nonverbally ([Guo et al., 2023](#); [Putri et al., 2024](#); [Santillo et al., 2025](#)). The facilitator began by presenting a short psychoeducation session on emotional expression and its relationship to marital stability. This was supported by recent literature demonstrating that emotional clarity and expression can reduce relational conflicts and enhance family well-being ([Waryanti, 2023](#)).

Participants were then guided to create their own House, Tree, and Person drawings using materials provided during the workshop. Art therapy procedures were adapted from contemporary expressive drawing models shown to be effective in supporting emotional regulation ([Astuti, 2024](#)) and reducing psychological stress ([Zhang et al., 2024](#)). After completing the drawings, cadres participated in a group reflection session where they described emotions, memories, or family experiences represented in their illustrations. Facilitators encouraged open discussion while maintaining a nonjudgmental and supportive environment.

Data Collection

Data were collected through field observations, participant worksheets, and brief reflective discussions. Observations focused on participants' engagement, emotional responses, and interactions during the drawing and reflection process. Reflective narratives provided qualitative data on how cadres interpreted the HTP drawings and their relevance to family emotional issues. Qualitative data collection is appropriate in art-based programs because expressive activities often reveal personal meaning that cannot be captured through quantitative measures ([Coholic et al., 2023](#); [Syam et al., 2023](#); [Sandberg, 2024](#)).

Data Analysis

All qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The researchers reviewed observation notes and participant reflections to identify recurring themes related to emotional awareness, family stressors, and perceived usefulness of the HTP technique. Thematic analysis is widely used in recent qualitative studies within art therapy and mental health because it allows flexible interpretation of participant narratives while maintaining methodological rigor ([Braun, & Clarke, 2022](#); [Putri et al., 2024](#); [Wyder, 2025](#)). Themes were then summarized to evaluate how effectively the workshop supported emotional reflection and its potential role in reducing the risk of family conflict or divorce.

Result

The results of the community service activity illustrate that the House-Tree-Person (HTP) drawing workshop effectively encouraged emotional reflection among the 20 village cadres who participated. Analysis of observation notes, participant worksheets, and group discussions revealed three major themes: increased emotional awareness, recognition of family stressors, and perceived usefulness of the HTP technique for community application. These themes align with recent evidence showing that expressive art activities promote emotional articulation in nonthreatening ways (Syam et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024). The qualitative analysis produced three major themes: increased emotional awareness, recognition of family stressors, and perceived usefulness of the HTP technique for community use. Participants expressed emotional insights and connected their drawings with real family dynamics. A summary of participant responses along with their demographics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes, Participant Demographics, and Responses From the HTP Emotional Reflection Workshop

| Participant | Theme | Description | Participant Statement | Interpretation |
|-------------|--|--|---|--|
| AS (F, 34) | Increased Emotional Awareness | Participants became more aware of their emotions through drawing activities. | "I didn't realize I was still carrying these feelings until I drew the house." | Drawing helped reveal suppressed emotions and internal states. |
| RM (M, 41) | Increased Emotional Awareness | Participants expressed emotional engagement and self-reflection. | "The tree I drew shows how unstable I feel inside." "The cracked window in my drawing represents my communication problem with my spouse." | Drawing served as an emotional mirror for inner experiences. Drawings symbolized family conflict and tension. |
| DN (F, 29) | Recognition of Family Stressors | Participants linked drawings to real family tensions. | "The empty yard shows the distance in my family lately." | Visual elements reflected emotional gaps in family relationships. |
| HL (M, 38) | Recognition of Family Stressors | Participants reflected on emotional distance in their household. | "Seeing my drawing, I realize how often I avoid talking about problems at home." | Drawing encouraged recognition of maladaptive communication patterns. |
| SY (F, 32) | Reflection on Marital Relationship Dynamics | Participants recognized personal behaviors affecting marital harmony. | "The small person in my picture reflects how insignificant I sometimes feel." | Symbolic imagery highlighted emotional vulnerability. |
| KD (M, 36) | Reflection on Marital Relationship Dynamics | Participants discovered feelings of insignificance. | "It turns out expressing emotions through drawing is easier than talking." | Nonverbal expression reduced discomfort and encouraged openness. |
| NR (F, 40) | Improved Understanding of Emotional Expression | Participants found drawing easier than verbal expression. | | |

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|-------------------|--|---|---|--|
| JP (M, 30) | Improved Understanding of Emotional Expression | Participants recognized difficulty in expressing emotions verbally. | "This technique helps me understand feelings that I struggle to say out loud." | Art encouraged emotional clarity and interpretation. |
| WT (F, 27) | Perceived Usefulness for Community Application | Participants saw potential for village-level use. | "I can use this method when assisting mothers who struggle to talk about their problems." | Cadres perceived HTP as suitable for community guidance. |
| FR (M, 35) | Perceived Usefulness for Community Application | Participants appreciated the simplicity of the method. | "This activity is simple and suitable for villagers; they will understand it easily." | HTP was viewed as practical, low-cost, and culturally adaptable. |
| LS (F, 33) | Increased Empathy Toward Family Members | Participants experienced shifts in understanding their families. | "After this activity, I understand my child's emotions better." | Emotional insight expanded empathy. |
| AM (M, 42) | Increased Empathy Toward Family Members | Participants reflected on their partner's emotional needs. | "I realize my partner also has unspoken feelings." | Emotional reflection fostered relational sensitivity. |
| EP (F, 28) | Motivation to Prevent Marital Conflict | Participants felt encouraged to improve communication. | "This makes me want to manage my emotions before things escalate." | Emotional awareness supported conflict prevention. |
| ZG (M, 39) | Motivation to Prevent Marital Conflict | Participants planned to apply the method at home. | "I want to try this with my spouse so we can communicate better." | HTP seen as a tool to strengthen marital communication. |



Figure 1. Participants of the House-Tree-Person art drawing workshop in Kepenuhan Hulu Village proudly displaying their completed drawings.

Increased Emotional Awareness

Most participants reported that the drawing process helped them identify personal emotions related to family experiences. Several cadres expressed that creating the House, Tree, and Person drawings felt "therapeutic," allowing them to

externalize feelings they had not previously discussed. Observations also showed visible emotional engagement, such as long pauses, reflective behaviors, and changes in tone during group sharing. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that drawing-based interventions can enhance self-awareness of emotional states (Astuti, 2024) and reduce internal psychological tension (Zhang et al., 2024).

Recognition of Family Stressors

A second major finding was the cadres' ability to connect their drawings with stressors affecting family dynamics, such as communication difficulties, role burdens, and unresolved conflicts. During the reflection session, participants described images that symbolized emotional distance, fear, or unmet expectations within their households. These reflections demonstrate the HTP method's potential to reveal symbolic representations of internal conflict, similar to its documented use in exploring hidden emotional issues in clinical and educational settings (Waryanti, 2023; Putri et al., 2024). Participants also acknowledged that such emotional stressors could escalate and contribute to marital instability if not addressed early.

Perceived Usefulness for Village Family Support

The third emerging theme was the recognition of the HTP drawing technique as a practical tool that cadres could apply in their community work. Participants expressed confidence in guiding families through simple drawing activities to encourage emotional communication, especially among individuals who find it difficult to verbalize their feelings. This mirrors recent findings that art therapy approaches are culturally adaptable and accessible for community-based mental health promotion (Hassan & Syazwan, 2022). Cadres emphasized that the technique was easy to understand, required minimal materials, and could be integrated into early counseling and family-support activities in the village.

Overall, the workshop successfully enhanced cadres' understanding of emotional reflection and strengthened their capacity to support families at risk of conflict or divorce. The qualitative findings indicate that expressive drawing facilitated deeper emotional insights, consistent with the psychological benefits of art therapy reported in recent studies (Syam et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). These outcomes suggest that HTP-based reflection activities can support preventive interventions aimed at improving family well-being in rural communities.

Discussion

The findings of this community service program indicate that the House-Tree-Person (HTP) art drawing workshop effectively facilitated emotional reflection among village cadres in Kepenuhan Hulu Village. Participants demonstrated increased emotional awareness, recognition of family stressors, and a deeper understanding of emotional expression—outcomes that align closely with recent literature on the

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benefits of expressive art techniques. Art-based activities have been shown to support emotional exploration and self-awareness by providing a nonverbal medium through which individuals can externalize internal experiences (Syam et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2024). The workshop results confirm these benefits within a rural community empowerment context.

The increased emotional awareness observed in the participants mirrors previous findings that drawing can reveal deep-seated or suppressed emotions. Astuti (2024) notes that expressive drawing helps individuals identify emotions that are difficult to articulate verbally, which was evident in participants' reflections about instability, fear, and emotional distance. This suggests that the HTP technique can serve as a powerful introductory tool for helping community members recognize emotional patterns that may contribute to family conflict or marital dissatisfaction.

Participants also identified meaningful connections between their drawings and real family stressors, such as communication breakdowns and emotional distance. This resonates with Waryanti's (2023) conclusion that art therapy in Indonesian communities often uncovers hidden emotional dynamics that are culturally difficult to express openly. Many participants described symbolic representations—such as cracked windows or empty yards—that reflected tensions within their households. Such findings reinforce the idea that the HTP method can uncover emotional indicators that may otherwise remain unspoken, thus supporting early identification of marital issues.

Another key finding is the perceived usefulness of the HTP technique for community application. Cadres expressed confidence in implementing the method with families in the village, particularly for individuals who find verbal communication challenging. Hassan and Syazwan (2022) highlight that art therapy approaches are adaptable and can be used effectively by trained non-professionals in community settings. The simplicity and accessibility of the HTP method—requiring only basic drawing materials—make it suitable for early emotional intervention in low-resource environments.

This workshop also demonstrated a positive shift in empathy among participants. Several cadres reported greater understanding of the emotions of their spouses and children. Previous studies suggest that emotional insight, when enhanced through reflective art activities, can improve relational empathy and reduce defensive behaviors during conflict (Syam et al., 2023). Therefore, the emotional benefits observed in this program have the potential to strengthen family relationships and contribute to preventive measures against marital conflict and divorce.

Furthermore, participants expressed motivation to apply the learned skills in their own families, demonstrating the practical relevance of the workshop beyond professional responsibilities. The outcomes align with evidence that art therapy-based interventions can enhance emotional regulation and promote healthier coping mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2024). When participants feel equipped to use emotional tools in daily life, the likelihood of lasting behavioral change increases.

Overall, this community service activity illustrates that the HTP drawing technique is not only effective for individual emotional reflection but also holds promise as a community-based preventive strategy for reducing the risk of divorce. By

equipping village cadres with reflective tools that are culturally sensitive, low-cost, and easy to implement, this program contributes to strengthening local support systems. The qualitative findings reinforce the value of integrating expressive arts into mental-health promotion efforts in rural Indonesian communities. Future programs may consider combining HTP reflection with structured family counseling sessions to enhance impact and sustainability.

Conclusion

The implementation of the House-Tree-Person (HTP) Art Drawing Workshop proved to be an effective community service intervention for facilitating emotional reflection within families at risk of conflict and potential divorce. Through guided drawing activities and structured group discussions, participants were able to externalize their emotions, increase awareness of unresolved feelings, and gain new perspectives on family dynamics. The workshop also provided a safe and non-threatening medium for individuals to communicate personal experiences that are often difficult to express verbally, thereby strengthening emotional openness and interpersonal understanding among family members.

Overall, the findings indicate that HTP-based reflective activities can support emotional regulation, improve communication, and foster empathy—three core components associated with healthier family relationships. While the program does not directly resolve complex marital issues, it offers a creative and meaningful approach to early prevention efforts aimed at reducing the risk of divorce. Future community programs are encouraged to expand the use of expressive art techniques, incorporate follow-up counseling, and explore longitudinal assessments to better understand the sustained impact of such interventions.

Implications for Community Practice

The outcomes of this program highlight several important implications for community-based family interventions. First, the use of expressive art methods such as the House-Tree-Person (HTP) drawing technique can serve as an accessible and culturally adaptable tool for early detection of emotional strain within families. Community practitioners, including counselors, social workers, and family educators, may incorporate HTP activities as a non-clinical entry point for discussing sensitive issues related to communication, conflict, and emotional needs. Because the activity does not require artistic skill and is perceived as non-threatening, it can effectively reduce resistance among participants who may otherwise be hesitant to engage in traditional counseling methods.

Second, the workshop model demonstrates that short-term, structured creative interventions can enhance emotional awareness and interpersonal insight. Practitioners working in community, religious, and educational settings may apply this approach as a preventive strategy for families experiencing early signs of relational tension. The integration of reflective group dialogue following the drawing

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session is particularly valuable, as it helps participants interpret their own emotional cues and recognize patterns that influence family interactions.

Third, the findings suggest the need for capacity building among community facilitators. Training in basic projective drawing interpretation, trauma-informed communication, and family systems awareness can strengthen the quality of community services and ensure responsible implementation of HTP-based programs. Community organizations may consider developing modular training programs that equip volunteers and practitioners to deliver these activities ethically and effectively.

Finally, the workshop provides a viable platform for multi-sector collaboration. Partnerships among universities, local government agencies, religious institutions, and family service organizations can expand reach and sustainability. These collaborations may support ongoing monitoring, follow-up sessions, and integration with broader family counseling initiatives. By embedding creative emotional-reflection tools within community practice, stakeholders can contribute to early prevention efforts aimed at strengthening family resilience and reducing the long-term risk of divorce.

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