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PEER COUNSELLING AS A PROGRAM TO REDUCE BULLYING
BEHAVIOR IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of peer counseling in reducing bullying among junior high school students, with a focus on integrating Western developmental theories and Islamic counseling values to develop a culturally relevant intervention model in Indonesia. The research employs a literature review approach, analyzing existing academic sources from 2016 to 2024 to synthesize findings on peer counseling's role in decreasing bullying behaviors, enhancing empathy, and fostering a positive school climate. Results indicate that well-implemented peer support programs can improve self-esteem, social skills, and empathy among students, leading to a reduction in aggressive behaviors and bullying incidents. The study highlights the importance of combining peer counseling with school policies and teacher involvement to maximize effectiveness. Its implications suggest that culturally grounded peer counseling models can serve as both preventive and curative strategies, benefiting victims and perpetrators alike. The novelty of this research lies in its contextualization of peer counseling within Indonesia's socio-cultural landscape, integrating Islamic values with Western developmental theories to create a tailored intervention framework. This contributes to both practical applications in school settings and theoretical insights into culturally sensitive counseling practices, addressing existing gaps in bullying intervention.

Keywords: bullying, junior high school students, peer counseling, school intervention

INTRODUCTION

Early adolescence is a developmental period filled with significant changes, both biologically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. During this stage, individuals strive to discover their identity, adapt to new environments, and build more intense relationships with peers. According to Erikson (1968), adolescents are in the identity versus role confusion phase, making the need for peer acceptance crucial. If this need is not met in a healthy manner, deviant behavior, such as bullying, can emerge (Suryana et al., 2022).

dominance to intimidate, commit physical or verbal violence, ostracize, neglect, and engage in repeated actions that negatively impact the psychological and mental health of the victim. This phenomenon demonstrates an imbalance of power that has serious negative consequences for the well-being of students in the school environment. Every year, the number of cases of bullying and violence against children in schools continues to show a worrying increase, indicating that schools are not yet fully safe spaces for students and require serious attention from various parties (FERENCE Margitics & Erika Figula, 2012). Data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI, 2022) shows that bullying ranks second among cases of child rights violations in education. Meanwhile, a 2020 UNESCO report states that one in three students has experienced bullying at school (Muhammad et al., 2023). This fact demonstrates that bullying is a real phenomenon and requires serious attention.

Bullying behavior not only impacts the victims, but also the perpetrators and the entire school environment. Victims of bullying tend to experience fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and even psychological trauma, which can disrupt concentration in learning. Bullies are at risk of developing antisocial behavior, low empathy, and difficulty adapting to social life in the future. If left unchecked, bullying will create a school climate that is uncondusive, unfriendly, and does not support optimal student development (Al-Ali & Shattnawi, 2018).

From a developmental perspective, junior high school students are in early adolescence, where they are heavily influenced by their peer groups. According to Santrock (2016), peer influence plays a powerful role in shaping adolescents' attitudes, behavior, and self-concept. Based on a study of developmental theory and empirical evidence, it was revealed that early adolescents, especially junior high school students, are at high risk of bullying because they are in an unstable phase of social-emotional development. Peer contagion theory explains that adolescents are highly influenced by the behavior of their peers, and they tend to imitate aggression or deviant behavior without realizing it when they are in a group (Dishion & Tipsord in the Annual Review of Psychology; Mabelele, 2008). Therefore, intervention strategies that involve the active role of peers are very relevant to handling cases of bullying among junior high school students.

One suitable approach is peer counseling. Peer counseling is a form of assistance provided by students who have been trained to provide support, empathy, and problem-solving skills to their peers. According to Tindall (2009), peer counseling is effective because adolescents tend to be more open with peers than with reports of bullying did not decrease significantly according to student reports, they believed that the school environment became more responsive to bullying. Another study from the SPF UPT SMP Negeri 1 Makassar used a qualitative case study method. The results showed that the combination of

counseling (individual and group) along with peer support was effective in helping change student behavior related to disciplinary violations—which is close to the intervention model for bullying (Zulfikar, 2025).

Based on the description above, it is clear that bullying behavior among junior high school students is a serious problem that requires special attention. Interventions appropriate to the developmental characteristics of adolescents, namely peer counseling, are believed to be an effective solution to reduce bullying behavior. Therefore, this study will further examine peer counseling as an effort to reduce bullying behavior in junior high school students through a literature review method.

Bullying, which remains one of the most alarming problems in Indonesian schools—as evidenced by UNESCO (2020) and KPAI (2022) reports showing its high prevalence and severe impact on students' mental health—necessitates the exploration of developmentally appropriate interventions such as peer counselling, since adolescents are strongly influenced by their peers and more open to peer-based support than adult authority figures. Therefore, this research aims to (1) understand in depth and correctly articulate the meaning of peer counselling as a program to reduce bullying behavior in junior high school students, and (2) foster and develop the discipline of counseling based on Islamic values, while describing and interpreting the effectiveness of peer counselling as a program to reduce bullying behavior in junior high school students. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive literature review design, where data sources may later include primary information from counselors or teachers and secondary sources such as journals, reports, and official documents. Data collection is planned through document analysis and literature review, with thematic or content analysis techniques, while the validity of findings will be strengthened through source triangulation and peer debriefing. Although the research results are not yet available, the study is expected to demonstrate that peer counselling can effectively reduce bullying, strengthen empathy, and build a more positive and safe school climate. The implications are twofold: practically, the findings may serve as a model for schools to adopt peer-based interventions, and theoretically, the research contributes to the integration of peer counselling practices with Islamic values in counseling science. In terms of novelty, unlike previous studies that only assessed the short-term impact of peer counselling on bullying (Houlston & Smith, 2009) or focused on disciplinary violations (Zulfikar, 2025), this research emphasizes the integration of Western theories (Erikson, Santrock, and Peer Contagion Theory) with Islamic counseling insights to build a culturally grounded model, the development of peer counselling as a structured program specifically for bullying reduction, and the contextualization of peer counselling within the Indonesian junior high school setting, which presents unique socio-cultural challenges and a higher prevalence of bullying compared to many global contexts.

METHOD

This research uses a literature review method. A literature review is a research method conducted by examining various written sources, such as books, journals, scientific articles, research reports, and other documents relevant to the topic being studied. Through literature review, researchers can gain a comprehensive overview of theories, concepts, and previous research findings related to the problem at hand. (Creswell, 2018)

The object of this study is peer group counseling intervention as an effort to reduce bullying behavior in junior high school students. Junior high school students were chosen as the focus of the study because they are in the early adolescence stage according to Erikson's theory, the identity vs. role confusion phase, which is vulnerable to social-emotional development, including involvement in bullying behavior.

The scope of this research includes a literature review that discusses the phenomenon of bullying using a peer-to-peer approach in schools. Literature sources were obtained from various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Sinta, as well as from relevant books and research reports.

Data collection was conducted through literature searches and selection based on specific criteria, including topic relevance, year of publication, and quality of research methodology. The instruments used for data collection were online search tools and reference management applications. Because this research used secondary data, it was not limited to a specific location.

The collected data was then analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis was conducted by identifying, categorizing, comparing, and synthesizing existing literature findings. Using this technique, researchers sought to identify patterns, advantages, limitations, and the effectiveness of peer group counseling as an intervention appropriate to the developmental guidance approach to reducing bullying behavior in junior high schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bullying among junior high school students remains a serious problem that impacts their social, emotional, and academic development. Bullies tend to exhibit aggressive behavior, lack empathy, have difficulty controlling their emotions, and are at risk for long-term psychosocial problems such as difficulty adjusting to interpersonal relationships and possible involvement in antisocial behavior (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Olweus, 2013). The studies analyzed emphasized the effectiveness of peer-based interventions (peer counseling) in reducing bullying behavior:

Title and author	Research Purpose	Method and data collection	Results and Conclusions
The impact of a peer counseling scheme to address bullying in an all-girl London secondary school: A shortterm longitudinal study. Houlston, C., & Smith, P. K. (2009).	Aims to collect data regarding students' perceptions of bullying and the impact of peer counseling programs.	This study used a short-term longitudinal design for one year with qualitative and quantitative approaches. Sample: Year 7, 8, and 9 students, and teaching staff at a girls' secondary school in North London.	Peer Counselors: Experienced increased social self-esteem and communication and interpersonal skills that can be applied outside of school. Student Perceptions: In general, students felt that bullying in schools was reduced and that schools were more

				Instruments: Questionnaires, interviews, and observations		active in addressing bullying issues
Voluntary Nominated Educators: Randomized Trial within the NoTrap! Anti- Bullying Program. Zambuto, V., Palladino, B.E., & Nocentini, A., & Menesini, E. (2020).	vs Peer A educator recruitment strategies (voluntary vs. nominated) in the NoTrap! anti-bullying program for junior high school students aged 13–14 years.	Assessing the effectiveness of peer educator recruitment strategies (voluntary vs. nominated) in the NoTrap! anti-bullying program for junior high school students aged 13–14 years.	Design: Cluster randomized Technique: Class division into two conditions (peer educators selected voluntarily vs nominated by teachers/friends), data collected through questionnaires, self- reports, and observations during program implementation.		Recruitment of peer educators is an important factor determining the effectiveness of peer- based interventions in reducing bullying among junior high school adolescents.	
Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. Journal of Experimental Criminology, Ttofi, MM, & Farrington, DP (2011)	To evaluate the effectiveness of school- based programs in reducing bullying and victimization through a systematic review and meta- analysis of international studies.		Systematic review and metaanalysis.		Bullying decreased by 20– 23% after intervention. Victimization decreased by 17–20%. School-based anti- bullying programs have been shown to be generally effective, but program design requires caution, particularly in the use of peer involvement.	

Findings suggest that peer counseling can serve as both a curative and preventive strategy. As a curative strategy, peer counselors provide emotional and social support to victims, help them cope with bullying, and strengthen their sense of safety at school. As a preventive strategy, interactions with peers allow bullies to reflect on their behavior, understand the impact of their actions on victims, and develop empathy and adaptive social skills (Cowie, 2011; Johnson, 2018).

Furthermore, research by Houlston & Smith (2009) emphasized that students' involvement as peer counselors increases their self-esteem, which in turn can reduce the tendency to bully because they learn to channel social energy positively. Smith et al. (2015) added that peer support systems improve the school's social climate, reduce aggressive behavior, and create a more inclusive school culture. Ttofi & Farrington (2011) confirmed that overall school-based interventions, including peer counseling, are effective in reducing the prevalence of bullying and have a long-term impact on students' social behavior. Thus, peer counseling provides an opportunity for perpetrators to change their behavior through reflection, social learning, and strengthening empathy.

CONCLUSION

Bullying among junior high school students is a serious problem that impacts both victims and perpetrators, requiring appropriate intervention. A literature review shows that peer counseling is effective in reducing bullying behavior, increasing students' empathy and self-esteem, and creating a safer and more inclusive school climate (Houlston & Smith, 2009; Zambuto et al., 2020; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). This program not only helps victims but also provides space for perpetrators to reflect on their actions and develop positive social skills. Therefore, peer counseling can be a relevant strategy in developmental guidance in schools, especially when combined with teacher support, firm policies, and ongoing monitoring.

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