

## Group Counseling through Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Cognitive Restructuring Technique for Self-Esteem Enhancement of Bullying Victims

Malya Milawati<sup>1\*</sup>, Awalya<sup>2</sup>, Siti Nuzulia<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

\*email correspondence: malyamilawati\_bks2@students.unnes.ac.id

Submitted: 2025-10-27. Revised: 2025-11-30. Accepted: 2025-12-20

**Abstrak.** Individu yang memiliki *self-esteem* baik mampu memandang dirinya secara positif, memiliki kepercayaan diri, serta mampu mengatasi permasalahan psikologis dan sosial sebagai bagian dari proses perkembangan dirinya. Namun, pada korban *bullying*, *self-esteem* cenderung rendah yang ditandai dengan perasaan tidak berharga, keraguan terhadap kemampuan diri, serta munculnya pola pikir negatif yang maladaptif. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini berupaya untuk meningkatkan *self-esteem* pada korban *bullying* melalui penerapan konseling kelompok dengan pendekatan *Cognitive Behavior Therapy* (CBT) menggunakan teknik *cognitive restructuring*. Penelitian menggunakan desain quasi experiment jenis *One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design*, melalui dua tahap pengukuran yaitu pretest dan post-test. Enam siswa yang memiliki *self-esteem* rendah dipilih sebagai partisipan penelitian. Hasil analisis menunjukkan adanya peningkatan *self-esteem* setelah diberikan intervensi. Uji Wilcoxon menunjukkan adanya peningkatan yang signifikan antara pre-test ke post-test. Sehingga secara keseluruhan, konseling kelompok dengan teknik *cognitive restructuring* terbukti efektif membantu siswa korban *bullying* dalam membangun pikiran yang lebih positif tentang diri mereka, sehingga *self-esteem* mereka meningkat. Temuan ini dapat menjadi dasar bagi konselor sekolah untuk menerapkan konseling kelompok teknik *cognitive restructuring* sebagai intervensi dalam menangani siswa korban *bullying*.

**Abstract.** Students with high self-esteem possess a positive self-concept and a confidence to navigate psychological and social challenges as part of their developmental process. However, victims of bullying tend to exhibit low self-esteem, characterized by feelings of worthlessness, pervasive self-doubt, and the emergence of maladaptive negative thought patterns. Consequently, this study aimed to enhance the self-esteem of bullying victims through a group counseling intervention utilizing cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with a focus on cognitive restructuring technique. The research employed a quasi-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design, involving two phases of measurement (pre and post-test). Six students identified as having low self-esteem were selected as participants. The analysis revealed a notable improvement in self-esteem based on the different test results before and after the intervention. Specifically, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test demonstrated a significant increase from pre-test to post-test scores. Overall, group counseling utilizing cognitive restructuring proved effective in assisting bullying victims to foster more positive self-perceptions that elevate their self-esteem. These findings provide a theoretical and practical basis for school counselors to implement cognitive restructuring as a primary intervention for supporting students who have experienced bullying.

**Key word:** Group Counseling; Cognitive Behavioral Therapy; Cognitive Restructuring Technique; Self-Esteem; Bullying.

## INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is not an innate or genetic trait; rather, it is constructed through lived experiences and environmental interactions. The social environment, particularly support from family and peers, serves as a critical factor in the development of children's self-esteem (Magro et al., 2019). Therefore, fostering self-esteem during adolescence is a vital consideration for various psychological interventions.

In victims of bullying, self-esteem tends to decrease as a direct result of the victimization they endure. Students experiencing this decline tend to feel inferior, worthless, and neglected. Furthermore, students with low self-esteem frequently exhibit high levels of academic procrastination; this occurs because a fear of failure prevents them from pursuing their goal which leads to a lack of effort in their academic endeavors (Ghasempour et al., 2024). If left unaddressed, this cycle continues to damage the students' self-image and severely undermines their esteem (Fajri et al., 2024).

Some previous empirical research supports the connection between these variables. A study by Saniya (2019) involving 109 high school students (aged 15–16) identified a strong correlation between high levels of bullying victimization and low self-esteem. Similarly, Arya and Syanti (2021) conducted a study with 121 adolescents (aged 12–15) and found that self-esteem is negatively correlated with bullying behavior; it showed a moderate level of correlation. These findings collectively suggest that adolescents who experience bullying are highly likely to suffer from diminished self-esteem.

The manifestation of low self-esteem in bullying victims is characterized by perceived social rejection, feelings of shame, difficulty concentrating on studies, and a sense of isolation or loneliness. In extreme cases, this may lead to school avoidance and a deep-seated resentment toward the school environment. A poor school climate or negative social atmosphere can further exacerbate low self-esteem which ultimately impacts students' mental health (de Arellano et al., 2023). Specifically, low self-esteem in this context is evidenced by difficulties in self-regulation, anxiety regarding public expression, hypersensitivity to criticism, and an inability to collaborate in groups. Such

students often feel unappealing to their friends, struggle to complete assigned tasks, and lack the confidence to make independent decisions (Nuraeini & Mastari, 2021).

These theoretical findings align with the interviews conducted by us to victims of traditional bullying. These individuals, who frequently endure direct verbal and physical aggression, such as mockery and physical intimidation, tend to withdraw socially, feel worthless, and lose their sense of self-assurance. Interview data reveal symptoms of low self-esteem, including social anxiety and a pervasive negative self-image. Furthermore, the victims often internalize their experiences, remaining reluctant to disclose the bullying to teachers or parents due to the fear of being perceived as weak or being disbelieved. These findings highlight the urgent need for safe, supportive, and targeted psychological interventions, such as group counseling using a cognitive restructuring approach, to help students reconstruct their self-esteem and facilitate psychological recovery.

Self-esteem helps students to reach their psychological well-being. In addition, it builds up the sense of composure for students within the school environment, particularly in their interactions with peers, seniors, and educators. Students with high self-esteem are more likely to experience sustained happiness across school-based and social activities. Therefore, the interventions aimed at bolstering students' self-esteem are essential to conduct. The development of self-esteem is affected by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. School counselors play an important role in this area by providing the motivation, attention, and support necessary to foster positive self-esteem in their students (Islam et al., 2023).

Due to the significances of self-esteem on students, curative measures are necessary to address the maladaptive behaviors observed in victims of traditional bullying such as on counseling. Therefore, Langford et al. (2022) demonstrated that a six-session cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) intervention for adolescents and young adults (aged 16–24) was not only feasible and well-received but also yielded substantial improvements in self-esteem that were maintained through follow-up assessments. This is further supported by Kunikata et al. (2021), whose findings suggested that group-

based CBT interventions are potentially effective in recovering self-esteem and improving clinical outcomes for students with mental health disorders.

However, not entirely findings in this field have the similar results. A study by Cendrowska et al. (2024), involving 59 experimental and 45 control participants, examined a 10-session CBT intervention aimed at reducing stigma and enhancing self-esteem. Their results indicated that the increase in self-esteem was not statistically significant in a comparative context. Thus, it suggests that CBT may not be universally effective for this specific psychological metric.

Beyond standard CBT, specific modalities such as self-instruction and thought-stopping techniques have proven effective in improving the self-esteem of bullying victims. Self-instruction technique is particularly recommended for school counselors, as it leverages students' natural capacity for self-verbalization, even when cognitive refinement is still in progress (Rostiana et al., 2019). Furthermore, cognitive restructuring approach is commonly used as a staple technique in modern psychotherapy for treating mood disorders, anxiety, and social skill deficits. It offers a structured approach to identify and transform negative cognitive patterns into rational and positive ones (Cebrián & Elvira, 2019). This technique is potential for bullying victims seeking to reconstruct their self-image. Recent research by Pradell et al. (2025) underscores its efficacy. They concluded that adapted cognitive restructuring technique helps mitigate the internalization of objective sentiments, tha allow students to process discriminatory experiences with greater self-awareness, empathy, and empowerment.

## METHODS

The research participants were identified through specific inclusion criteria. We targeted eighth-grader at an Islamic junior high school during the 2025/2026 academic year who had experienced bullying and exhibited low self-esteem. The sample size involved was determined through a power analysis conducted via the G\*Power app. With a significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05 and a statistical power of 0.95, the analysis indicated a minimum requirement of six participants. Therefore, this study participants consisted of three male and three female students.

To measure the primary variable, this study utilized a self-esteem scale adapted from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965). It employs a four-point Likert format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Prior to the primary intervention, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 200 students to ensure psychometric validity. The results confirmed that 10 items from the adapted scale were valid with a reliable Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.721.

This quantitative research employed a quasi-experimental with one-group pre-test-post-test design. It was conducted over more than one month through six counseling sessions (2 x 35 minutes). This design allowed for the assessment of self-esteem across two critical phases: a pre-test administered prior to the intervention to establish a baseline, and a post-test administered following the completion of the group counseling sessions with cognitive restructuring technique. The research design of this study is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Research Design**

| <i>Pretest</i> | <i>Intervensi</i> | <i>Post-test</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| O <sub>1</sub> | X                 | O <sub>2</sub>   |

Information:

O<sub>1</sub> : Pre-test; giving self-esteem psychological scale to students.

X : Group counseling utilizing cognitive restructuring technique.

O<sub>2</sub> : Post-test; utilizing self-esteem psychological scale after the intervention.

The intervention followed a structured cognitive restructuring protocol: (1) Rationale and goal setting; (2) Identification of maladaptive thoughts; (3) Introduction of coping thoughts; (4) Shifting negative cognitive patterns; (5) Introduction and guided practice; (6) Assignment.

The data analysis was performed using non-parametric statistics, specifically the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. This technique was selected to determine the significance of the disparities between the paired pre-test and post-test scores within the subject group.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the study conducted (see Table 2), the pre-test score has  $M=18.67$  and  $SD=1.21$  while  $M= 29.50$ ;  $SD=5.01$  for post-test. From this information, it can be identified that the participants' self-esteem scores were low. However, after the intervention, a substantial increase in scores was observed through post-test.

**Table 2. Research Results**

|                  | M     | SD   |
|------------------|-------|------|
| <i>Pre-test</i>  | 18.67 | 1.21 |
| <i>Post-test</i> | 29.50 | 5.01 |
| <i>Z</i>         | -2.20 |      |
| <i>p</i>         | 0.02  |      |

According to Table 2, a significant difference between pre-test and post-test self-esteem scores is confirmed. In addition, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test results indicate a statistically significant increase following the intervention ( $Z = -2.20$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that group counseling utilizing CBT with cognitive restructuring technique is highly effective in significantly fostering students' self-esteem.

The findings of this study support the previous research conducted by Pradita et al. (2022) among high school students in Pekanbaru. They discovered that cognitive restructuring accounted for a 60% improvement in the self-esteem of body-shaming victims. Similarly, Rani et al. (2022) demonstrated that a four-session CBT program (consisting of 90-minute sessions) effectively enhanced self-esteem by fundamentally altering students' core beliefs, thought patterns, and emotional responses.

The effectiveness of cognitive restructuring in this context aligns with the theoretical premise that reframing one's cognitive appraisal of oneself and the environment is critical to mitigating the psychological impact of bullying. In addition, cognitive restructuring functions by identifying and challenging maladaptive thoughts and replacing them with more adaptive ones; it affects to the enhancement of students' self-esteem (Dobson & Dozois, 2019). This technique is particularly well-suited for correcting the irrational beliefs that underpin low self-esteem as it empowers students to transform self-defeating anxieties into rational cognitive frameworks (Anggita, 2021).

Furthermore, enhancing the self-esteem of bullying victims has positive effects for their academic trajectory. As Artika (2021) stated that it is imperative for school counselors to provide timely psychological interventions to students under duress to safeguard their self-worth. When students operate from a foundation of high self-esteem, they are better equipped to evaluate their progress and develop their learning capacity.

Theoretically, these results reinforce the core implication of CBT; it illustrates that targeting negative automatic thoughts and maladaptive self-schemas is essential for psychological recovery. Moreover, the group dynamics inherent in this counseling process underscore the importance of social context; the group serves not only as a support network but also as a catalyst for cognitive and emotional change through interpersonal feedback, modeling, and social reinforcement.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that group counseling utilizing cognitive restructuring technique is effective in enhancing the self-esteem of students who have experienced bullying. The significant improvement in post-intervention scores, validated by the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, underscores the potency of this approach.

Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to deepen the empirical understanding of this intervention by exploring the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring through more complex models. In addition, subsequent studies could benefit from incorporating moderating or mediating variables, such as the severity of bullying, levels of social support, emotional regulation strategies, or family dynamics. Such investigations would provide clearer insights into the specific factors that influence the overall efficacy of the intervention across diverse student populations.

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