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The effectiveness of group counseling utilizing cognitive restructuring and thought stopping techniques to enhance *welas asih*

Cempaka Wuryani Kusuma^{1*}, DYP Sugiharto², Ali Murtadho³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Group counseling, cognitive restructuring, thought stopping, <i>welas asih</i>	<i>Welas asih</i> (or known as compassion) contributes to the adolescent development as they show often a tendency to exhibit low levels of compassion when faced with social demands from their peer environment. This research aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling based on Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) that employs cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques to enhance <i>welas asih</i> among students. This research utilized an experimental method with a randomized pretest-posttest comparison group design. By involving 16 students from a public high school in Kota Semarang, this research targets the respondents that demonstrated low levels of compassion. Data analysis using the Wilcoxon test revealed that group counseling with CBT techniques, including cognitive restructuring and thought stopping, effectively increased <i>welas asih</i> among students. However, the cognitive restructuring technique proved to be more effective than the thought-stopping technique. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of the study, including broader subject samples and alternative research designs.

*Correspondence address:
 E-mail: cempaka.wuryani@gmail.com

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Introduction

Welas asih (or known as compassion) is an essential attitude that every individual should possess in their daily lives as living beings. Compassion is understood as the ability to endure someone's suffering with warmth, connection, and care (NEFF, 2003). *Welas asih* encompasses six components: three representing self-compassion attitudes (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness) and three representing non-compassionate attitudes toward oneself (self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification). Due to its facts, the enhancement of *welas asih* can have a positive impact on students, particularly during adolescence period. Adolescents frequently face various social demands that may lead to numerous challenges, requiring interventions to help them resolve these issues. Guidance and counseling services in schools play a crucial role in supporting students in navigating such difficulties. Among these services, group counseling with various approaches serves as an effective means to address students' problems. One of the counseling groups mentioned is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). CBT offers multiple techniques, including cognitive restructuring and thought stopping. However, a review of the literature reveals a lack of studies utilizing CBT group counseling with these specific techniques as interventions to enhance compassion. Consequently, this study employs a CBT approach incorporating cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques to address this research gap.

In cognitive behavioral counseling, students learn to recognize negative thoughts and replace them with more positive and adaptive ones. Previous studies have explored various interventions to enhance *welas asih*. First, Rasyid et al. (2018) found that interventions using mirror-talk or self-talk training effectively increased *welas asih* among university students. However, this research focused on a different subject group, namely high school students, and employs different interventions. Similarly, Madidar and Muhid (2021) demonstrated that engaging in positive activities such as drawing and painting can enhance *welas asih*, suggesting the effectiveness of art therapy. In contrast, this research employed a CBT approach using different techniques. In addition, previous research has also found that group CBT counseling effectively increases *welas asih* among adolescents by reducing addictive social media behaviors (Hariastuti et al., 2020). Cognitive restructuring has been shown

to be particularly beneficial for individuals burdened by negative thoughts and, in some cases, those exhibiting excessive responses to life challenges (Rufaidah & Karneli, 2020). This aligns with the experiences of individuals with low levels of compassion, especially those who frequently overreact to situations—a phenomenon described in the over-identification aspect of compassion (NEFF, 2003). The application of cognitive restructuring techniques has proven effective in various contexts, including boosting students' self-confidence (Rukmana, 2020); Setiyowati et al., 2023), enhancing student resilience (Dari et al., 2022), improving body image perception among students (Al Islami et al., 2026), reducing learning difficulties (Tyas et al., 2024), alleviating exam-related anxiety (Safithry, 2022) and mitigating academic anxiety (Riyadah et al., 2021). Similarly, the thought-stopping technique is utilized to enhance *welas asih*. This technique is frequently employed to address emotional and behavioral issues by focusing on thought patterns and mood states. It helps individuals manage their inability to control self-critical thoughts and negative self-images by suppressing or eliminating such negative awareness (Hidayatullah & Muslihati, 2025).

Thought-stopping technique is particularly effective in reducing maladaptive behaviors, alleviating anxiety, controlling negative thoughts, overcoming distressing experiences, and mitigating unhealthy self-criticism or excessive self-blame (Hidayatullah & Muslihati, 2025). By regularly applying this technique, students can learn to interrupt negative thought patterns, replace them with more positive and compassionate ones, and ultimately enhance *welas asih* through its various dimensions. This process helps them feel better about themselves and recover from unpleasant experiences. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of thought-stopping techniques in addressing several psychological symptoms among adolescents, such as reducing social anxiety (Bulantika, 2018), alleviating feelings of insecurity (Acuña et al., 2025), enhancing self-esteem in bullying victims addressing low self-esteem (Ambo et al., 2023), boosting self-esteem in bullying victims and reducing consumptive behaviors.

Preliminary research conducted by the authors at a public high school in Kota Semarang revealed the low levels of *welas asih* among students. The findings indicated that 48.4% of students fell into the low category, 37.5% were in the moderate category, and only 14.1% exhibited high levels of *welas asih*. These results highlight the need for interventions to improve compassion among students. Previous studies have shown that CBT group counseling effectively increases *welas asih* in adolescents by reducing addictive behaviors related to social media use (Rizal et al., 2020). However, no prior research has specifically utilized cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques as interventions to enhance *welas asih*, despite their integration within the CBT framework. Nonetheless, previous research has demonstrated that CBT techniques effectively help students enhance various aspects of compassion (Mayasari & Pringsewu, 2021). Additionally, numerous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of group counseling using cognitive behavioral approaches, such as cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping, in addressing various psychological issues. However, no studies have specifically examined the use of cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques to improve *welas asih* in students within the context of cognitive behavioral group counseling, particularly in Kota Semarang. Another rationale for employing these two techniques to enhance *welas asih* lies in prior literature, which illustrates their positive impact on various psychological challenges faced by adolescents. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques in enhancing students' *welas asih*. The findings were expected to benefit school counselors and guidance teachers in addressing student issues, particularly those related to *welas asih*.

Method

The participants in this study comprised 16 students selected from 64 students identified with low scores of *welas asih*. This research involved students aged 16–18 years, enrolled in the 11th grade at a public high school in Semarang, who were categorized as having low levels of *welas asih* and were willing to participate in group counseling sessions. The data collection utilized a compassion scale adapted from (Büyüköksüz et al., 2025). Skala *Welas Diri* (SWD) or Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) consists of 26 items based on the indicators of self-kindness, self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness, and over-identification. The scale uses a Likert format with four response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Reliability testing of the scale yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.788. This research followed several steps. First, a pretest was administered using the compassion scale. Second, interventions were conducted in the form of group counseling sessions employing cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques.

For the cognitive restructuring group, the focus was on replacing negative thoughts with positive ones by eliminating irrational beliefs and developing new, positive cognitive patterns and responses. This was achieved through activities such as identifying and practicing coping thoughts, transforming negative thoughts into coping thoughts, and introducing and reinforcing positive beliefs. For the thought-stopping group, the focus

was on halting and altering irrational or negative attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and thought patterns that cause anxiety. Participants engaged in group exercises to identify negative thoughts, receive feedback from others, and were encouraged to construct statements that enhance self-esteem, improve problem-solving skills, and promote effective actions. These statements served to counter self-defeating thoughts. Both the cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping interventions were conducted over five sessions, each lasting 2 x 45 minutes. Finally, a posttest was administered to assess changes in students' compassion levels. This experimental research employed a randomized pretest-post-test comparison group design.

Result and Discussion

The data were collected from the results of pre-test and post-test measurements and analyzed using the Wilcoxon test. At the initial measurement, all 16 students were identified as having low levels of compassion. These participants were then divided into two groups: the cognitive restructuring group ($M = 47.78$, $SD = 2.863$) and the thought-stopping group ($M = 45.57$, $SD = 3.690$). Following the intervention, both groups demonstrated significant changes. The cognitive restructuring group showed an increase in the levels of *welas asih* ($M = 90.22$, $SD = 2.991$), while the thought-stopping group also experienced improvement ($M = 71.43$, $SD = 12.869$). These results indicate a shift in students' levels of *welas asih* from the low to the high category in both groups after the intervention. A Wilcoxon test was subsequently conducted to examine the detailed improvements in *welas asih* within each group.

The analysis results are presented in Table 1. (what/how) Is the data presented processed (not raw data), set in tables or figures (choose one), and given understandable information? Write down the findings, but don't discuss here; • (why) in the discussion section it looks like there is a link between the results obtained with the basic concepts or hypotheses or both? In some science fields, they have to discuss the smallest aspects. The discussion made must be supported by real and clear facts; • (what else) is there any compatibility or conflict with the results of other people's research? (therefore, there must be references to other literature, especially literature mentioned in the previous research state of problem).

Results should summarize findings rather than just presenting detailed research data • Statement of findings must be supported by a lack of study data or opinion analysis based on existing theoretical concepts so that they can become a new theory. • Don't describe the numbers (tables/graphs) in detail, but rather to present Findings or trends. • Write data that has been processed in the article (in the form of tables or graphs/figures but not both for the same data) • Statistical data and differences may be presented. Each Equation must be given several equations that are placed to the right of the equation. The notation/symbol information in the equation is explained in paragraph form, not in the item list form. The following is an example of writing images and tables.

Table 1. Results of Wilcoxon and mann whitney test

	Pre-test		Post-test		Z	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
CR	47.78	2.863	90.22	2.991	-2.66	<.01
TS	45.57	3.690	71.43	12.869	-2.36	<.05
<i>z</i>	-1.337	-3.130				
<i>p</i>	>.05	<.05				

The Wilcoxon test employed in this study compared two independent samples. Also known as the Sign Test, this method is used to compare two samples derived from a single group or paired measurements taken at two different times. Table 1 illustrates significant increases in *welas asih* for both the cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping groups ($z = -2.66$, $p < 0.05$; $z = -2.36$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). Prior to the intervention, the pre-test results indicated no significant differences in the levels of *welas asih* between the cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping groups ($z = -1.337$, $p > 0.05$). However, after the intervention, the post-test results revealed significant differences in the levels of *welas asih*, with the cognitive restructuring group demonstrating higher levels than the thought-stopping group ($z = -3.130$, $p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that group counseling using cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques effectively increases *welas asih* of students. Through cognitive restructuring, students are guided to identify their negative thoughts, articulate positive thoughts they hold, and transform their negative thinking into positive cognition (Magfirah et al., 2025)

Welas asih has a substantial impact on individuals' mental health. In addition, *welas asih* significantly predicts both positive and negative mental health factors (Min et al., 2022). It represents a positive self-attitude and an emotion-regulation strategy, allowing individuals to confront their pain and failures with openness, tolerance, and unbiased understanding rather than avoidance (NEFF, 2003). This finding is supported by

previous research highlighting the positive and significant impact of *welas asih* on mental health variables. (Min et al., 2022). Demonstrated that compassion positively influences adolescents' mental health. Similarly, prior studies have established a strong correlation between higher levels of *welas asih* and improved psychological well-being. Adolescents who cultivate *welas asih* exhibit lower levels of anxiety and depression, greater resilience, and enhanced self-esteem (Anggasta, 2023). Furthermore, research emphasizes the importance of *welas asih* in promoting psychological well-being and highlights gender-based differences in compassion levels among male and female students.

This research is consistently supported by earlier research showing that cognitive restructuring effectively addresses individuals burdened by negative thoughts and, in some cases, excessive responses to life challenges (Rufaidah & Karneli, 2020). This aligns with the experiences of individuals with low *welas asih*, particularly those who frequently overreact to situations, a phenomenon described as over-identification (Neff, 2003). Additional previous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of cognitive restructuring in enhancing *welas asih*. For instance, Mayasari & Pringsewu, (2021) found that this technique effectively improves various aspects of *welas asih*. Similarly, Prasetyowati & Farid (2025) reported that group CBT counseling employing cognitive restructuring techniques significantly increased *welas asih* among high school students. The effectiveness of the thought-stopping technique observed in this research is also supported by previous research. Studies have shown that this technique effectively addresses several psychological symptoms in adolescents, including reducing social anxiety (Bulantika, 2018), alleviating insecurity (Acuña et al., 2025), enhancing self-esteem in bullying victims, addressing low self-esteem (Ambo et al., 2023), boosting self-esteem among bullying victims and reducing consumptive behavior.

Moreover, previous literature reviews have demonstrated that the thought-stopping technique is effective in addressing psychological issues such as insecurity, anxiety, and low self-esteem—issues that are often linked to the negative aspects of *welas asih*, particularly isolation. This aspect involves individuals feeling unworthy, withdrawing from their environment, and perceiving themselves as undeserving of social inclusion (NEFF, 2003). Enhancing the positive aspects of *welas asih* helps individuals cultivate higher levels of compassion, which can significantly aid students in overcoming their challenges. Thought stopping assists individuals struggling to control negative thoughts and self-perceptions by suppressing or eliminating negative awareness (Hidayatullah & Muslihati, 2025). Previous studies have also established the efficacy of cognitive restructuring in addressing psychological issues commonly experienced by adolescents, such as fear, anxiety, lack of confidence, and avoidance behaviors in social settings. These issues are often associated with the negative aspects of *welas asih*, including isolation, over-identification, and self-judgment. These aspects involve feelings of worthlessness, perceiving oneself as suffering the most, exaggerating situations, withdrawing from social environments, and engaging in excessive self-criticism (NEFF, 2003).

In contrast to cognitive restructuring, the thought-stopping technique has received limited research attention, particularly concerning its application in enhancing *welas asih*. Nonetheless, prior studies have demonstrated that thought stopping is effective in addressing psychological issues such as insecurity, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which are often linked to the isolation aspect of low *welas asih*, where individuals feel unworthy and withdraw from their surroundings (NEFF, 2003). This cognitive restructuring has a greater impact compared to thought stopping, as evidenced by the higher average scores of *welas asih* observed in students within the cognitive restructuring group. However, both techniques are effective in enhancing *welas asih* among students, demonstrating their potential for improving psychological well-being.

Conclusion

Based on the findings on this research, it is concluded that group counseling using cognitive restructuring and thought-stopping techniques effectively enhances *welas asih* among high school students. This study suggests that school counselors and guidance teachers should consider employing these techniques in group counseling to address students' issues, particularly those related to *welas asih*. Furthermore, future researchers are encouraged to broaden the scope of the study by including a larger and more diverse sample of participants. Expanding the range of dependent variables that may influence *welas asih* is also recommended. Additionally, subsequent studies could further refine and strengthen theoretical and empirical understandings of the thought-stopping technique in improving compassion, while taking into account factors such as gender, age, and cultural background.

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