

## Group Counseling with Systematic Desensitization Techniques and Thought-Stopping Techniques to Reduce Social Anxiety

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### Article Info

#### History Articles

Received:  
August 2018  
Accepted:  
September 2018  
Published:  
December 2018

#### Keywords:

*social anxiety,  
systematic desensitization  
technique,  
thought-stopping technique*

#### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.15294/jubk.v7i2.25494>

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of systematic desensitization and thought-stopping counseling groups to reduce students' social anxiety. Randomized Pretest-Posttest Comparison Group Design was applied to students as many as 24 students in SMA N 12 Semarang. The instruments used were the Social Anxiety Scale For Adolescents. Data analysis techniques were used using Paired sample t-test and one-way ANOVA test. The results showed that group counseling techniques were systematic desensitization and thought-stopping effective to reduce students' social anxiety. The findings of this study prove the effectiveness of group counseling with systematic desensitization techniques and thought stopping techniques in students in the city of Semarang Indonesia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is prone to occur in teenager period because this period belongs to transitional phases and is commonly referred to storm and drunk or typhoons and hurricanes period because of the existence of emotional instability which further may cause many problems. One of the anxieties that can occur in individuals or teenagers is in terms of social interactions engagement. In social interaction, not all individuals feel safe and comfortable. There are also those who have feelings of anxiety, fear, or worry about the surrounding environment called social anxiety.

The most difficult challenge for teenagers is interaction and self-adjustment with increasing peer group influence, changes in social behavior, social grouping, new values in the selection of friendship, support, social rejection, and leader selection. One that is prone to personality disorders in children is social anxiety. Anxiety will interact with the environment because not all individuals in teenager period can comfortably interact with their social environment (Mutahari, 2016).

Social anxiety is a term used to describe an anxiety that is characterized by emotional discomfort, fear, worry and maladaptive behavior associated with social situations. This is a significant problem given the social nature of human and functional social relations cannot be avoided in human life (McNeil & Randall in Hofman 2014). Social anxiety disorder involves a marked fear and continuous negative evaluation in social and/or performance situations (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Hofmann (2014) said socially anxious individuals tend to be shy and withdrawn as well as ineffectively contribute in social interaction. This is possible because the individuals perceive a negative reaction. A simpler understanding of social anxiety is a feeling shame of being assessed or cared by others because of the prejudice that others value negatively toward them. People who experience fear in social interaction will withdraw from relationships, try to communicate as small as possible, and will communicate when

being forced. If they communicate, often the conversation is irrelevant because the relevant speaking by the anxious individuals will certainly invite the reaction of others and they are mostly required to speak again. Social anxiety will likely interfere with normal conditions in developments related to social and personal relationships and result in avoidance or rejection. Furthermore, the problem of social anxiety disorder in teenager period increases by showing behaviors such as silencing, running away from home, fighting, and lying (Ford, 2007).

Preliminary studies at Public Senior High School (SMA Negeri) 12 Semarang found that social anxiety apparently occurred to many students. The percentages of social anxiety obtained were 35 students or 33% in the high category, 47 students or 44% of students in the medium category, and 23 students or 21% of students in the low category. Students who experienced social anxiety had symptoms such as: (1) excessive fear when interacting with strangers, (2) fear of situations where the students can be assessed, (3) fear that others will see that the student is looking anxious, (4) anxiety that interferes with the daily routine of the learning process in class or other activities outside the classroom, (5) avoids doing something or talking to people for fear of embarrassment, (6) avoid situations where students may be the center of attention, (7) difficulties in making eye contact, and (8) difficulties talking.

Seeing the problems of the students above, there is a need to provide other group counseling services techniques that can help students overcome social anxiety. One way that can be done to help individuals in the process of changing feelings, ways of thinking, and acting related to social anxiety to make the individuals able to have confidence in their abilities, and positively view other people's perceptions of themselves, is by applying cognitive behavioral approach (CBT) group counseling service with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques.

In relation to efforts to reduce students' social anxiety, this systematic desensitization technique has advantages that can be seen from

several previous studies. Ferenidou, et al. (2012) conducted a study with systematic desensitization technique for BII (Blood-Injury-Injection) phobias and social phobia, Melhim (2015) & Fitri (2017) also measured the effectiveness of systematic desensitization in reducing academic anxiety. Further Ariani, et al. (2016) tested the effectiveness of systematic desensitization technique for students having anxiety of speaking in front of the class. This was supported by a research conducted by Latipun, et al. (2016) about using thought stopping technique on nursing students who experienced blood injection anxiety. For more, Dewi, et al. (2015) have also conducted research using thought stopping technique to minimize anxiety in students' who were about to face academic evaluation.

From several studies above, it can be seen that systematic desensitization technique was applied to BII (Blood-Injury-Injection) phobias and social phobia. However, the research did not focus only on social phobia but also on clients who had BII phobias. Then, on the next study, systematic desensitization technique was performed to reduce anxiety academic. This means that the study only focused on the results of the academic field. Another study looked at the influence of systematic desensitization technique and implausible techniques for the anxiety of speaking in front of the class. This study focused on students who had anxiety when speaking in front of the class without seeing the condition of students' anxiety in the general social situation and this study looked at how far the difference in the effects of implosive techniques and systematic desensitization techniques without taking into account the effectiveness of systematic desensitization techniques on anxiety in front of the class.

Furthermore, other studies using thought stopping technique on clients who experienced injection anxiety. This study saw the impact of thought stopping technique on clients or patients who had anxiety problems during blood injection. There is also a research using thought stopping technique to minimize students' anxiety in facing academic evaluation. The focus of this

research was to change the mindset and behavior of students towards anxiety in facing academic evaluation.

Based on the explanation of the above study, systematic desensitization technique and thought stopping techniques were hypothesized to be able to reduce the social anxiety of high school students. Mean while, in this study, social anxiety became the focus of the problem given the social nature of human and functional social relations cannot be avoided in human life. In addition, social anxiety disorder can be very disturbing development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and can affect students' learning conditions at school. Besides, the selection of these techniques arose based on a study which suggested in order to reduce social anxiety, students need a special approach that can open and fix the mindset of students which of these changes in mindset will have an impact on changes in behavior, and can help students in the process of changing feelings, and acting related to social anxiety so that individuals are able to have confidence in their abilities, and positively view other people's perceptions of themselves. In general, this study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the group counselling with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques to reduce the social anxiety of students in SMA Negeri 12 Semarang.

## METHODS

This study used a Randomized Pretest-Posttest Comparison Group Design. Meanwhile, the subjects in this study were taken by using purposive random sampling technique. There were as many as 24 students were taken as research subjects with characteristics of having high social anxiety. They were then grouped into 3, namely group A who received systematic desensitization technique, group B who received thought stopping technique, and group C who received systematic desensitization technique and thought stopping techniques. After that, pretests were given to experimental groups. This pretest was given before the groups were given treatment. Next, the treatments were given to the

experimental group. The experimental group A was given a treatment in the form of group counseling with systematic desensitization technique, experimental group B was given group counseling treatment with thought stopping technique and experiment group C was given treatment in the form of group counseling with systematic desensitization technique and thought stopping techniques. Once the treatments done, posttests were given to the experimental groups. This posttest was given to find out the difference in the results of the treatment given earlier. Additionally, this study used data collection technique in for of social anxiety scale (SAS-A; La Greca & Lopez, 1998). Alternatively, the hypotheses testing was done by using paired-sampled t-test test analysis technique and one-way ANOVA.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' social anxiety level conditions after getting the intervention of group counselling with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques showed a decrease. Further, the hypotheses testing to test  $H_a$  in this study was done using paired-sampled t-test and one-way ANOVA test analysis techniques. This Paired Sampled t-test was used to determine the mean or mean difference between pretest and posttest results in each group, then one-way ANOVA test aimed to determine the effectiveness difference between group counselling with systematic

desensitization technique, thought stopping technique, and the combination of them. The results of the calculation of the data before and after and the differences in the effectiveness of the group counselling service with systematic desensitization technique, thought stopping technique, and the combination of them are presented in table 1.

Based on table 1, it was known that there was a difference in the average value of students' social anxiety level in the systematic desensitization group before and after the treatment ( $M = 22.75$ ,  $SD = 6.04$ ;  $t_{(7)} = 10.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These indicated that group counseling with systematic desensitization technique was effective to reduce the level of social anxiety. On the other hand, in the thought stopping group, the difference in the average value of students' social anxiety level before and after was ( $M = 17.12$ ,  $SD = 5.61$ ;  $t_{(7)} = 8.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results proved that group counseling with thought stopping technique was effective to reduce the level of the social anxiety of students. Next, in the combined group between systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques, the difference in the average value of students' social anxiety level before and after was ( $M = 27.87$ ,  $SD = 9.70$ ;  $t_{(7)} = 8.12$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results showed that group counseling with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques was effective to reduce students' level of social anxiety.

**Table 1.** Results of Change in Pretest and Posttest Scores

Group	Pretest		Posttest		$t_{(7)}$	P	Gain score		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD			M	SD		
SD	63.75	8.25	41.00	3.25	10.65	< 0.01	22.75	6.04	23.22	< 0.01
TS	68.63	8.86	51.50	4.95	8.62	< 0.01	17.12	5.61		
SD+TS	63.38	8.01	35.50	5.75	8.12	< 0.01	27.87	9.70		

Notes:

SD: Systematic desensitization

TS: Thought stopping

SD+TS: Systematic desensitization + Thought stopping

ANOVA test results showed a difference in the effectiveness between group counseling services with systematic desensitization technique, group counseling services with thought stopping technique, and group

counseling services with the combination of systematic desensitization technique and thought stopping techniques to reduce students' level of social anxiety, namely ( $F_{(2,21)} = 23.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results showed that the group counseling

with the combination of systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques was more effective than the group counseling with systematic desensitization technique and group counseling thought stopping technique.

From the results of the study, it was known that group counseling with systematic desensitization and thought stopping technique were proven to be effective in reducing students' social anxiety. These results are in accordance with the opinion expressed by Tresna (2011) who found that the effectiveness of systematic desensitization technique proves that overall anxiety has decreased substantially in terms of testing, so it is proven that systematic desensitization techniques are effective in reducing anxiety in facing the test. Based on the results of program testing, behavioral counseling with systematic desensitization technique can be considered as a work reference framework in the practice of guidance and counseling services to help reducing anxiety in facing the test on students. Furthermore, Sutisna & Tadjri's study (2016) examined the effectiveness of behavioral group counselling with systematic desensitization techniques assisted by Javanese classical music.

The results showed that behavioral group counseling with systematic desensitization techniques assisted by Javanese classical music was effective to reduce students' communication apprehension. It relates to situations where students must be able to communicate or social interaction, and this current study proved that systematic desensitization techniques could reduce communication apprehension in students. Willis (2004) also argues that anxiety can be reduced or decreased through a conditioned effort, and it can be done by using systematic desensitization technique. Also, Ifeanyi, et al. study (2015) used systematic desensitization technique to reduce anxiety when facing an exam. The results showed that systematic desensitization techniques are effective for reducing the anxiety.

In line with a research conducted by Madoni, et al. (2018) who have tested the effectiveness of group counseling with systematic desensitization technique in reducing anxiety in

public speaking and the results of group counseling with systematic desensitization technique have proven effective in reducing anxiety in public speaking, Corey (2010) also states that "systematic desensitization technique can also be applied effectively in various anxiety-producing situations." In addition, systematic desensitization technique is an effort used to reduce emotional sensitivity that is frightening, worrying or unpleasant by thinking or imagining something and calming down to achieve a relaxed/calm state (Erford, 2016).

Thus, systematic desensitization technique has a good impact on decreasing levels of social anxiety because it helps to calm clients from tensions experienced by teaching them to relax and eliminate negative reinforced behaviors and include responses that are contrary to behavior to be removed.

Furthermore, thought stopping technique is one of the solutions to overcome students' social anxiety. The results of this study are supported by the opinion of Videbeck (2008) which states that behavioral therapy is seen as effective in overcoming anxiety disorders. Various types of behavioral therapy techniques are used as learning and practice directly in an effort to reduce or overcome anxiety. One of which is thought stopping therapy. In addition, the results of this study are also relevant to the research conducted by Latipun, et al. (2016) that the application of thought stopping technique can reduce the level of anxiety experienced by nursing students.

A research conducted by Hidayati & Riwayati (2015) reveals an increase in the ability to overcome anxiety in HIV/AIDS of clients before and after being given treatment in the form of thought stopping therapy. Also, a research conducted by Malfasari & Erlin (2017) found that Thought Stopping is one of the therapies that can reduce the anxiety of students who are carrying out clinical practices at the hospital.

Above studies are relevant to the results of Supriati's research (2010) that thought stopping and progressive muscle relaxation techniques on anxiety in clients with physical disorders show effective or meaningful results. Furthermore,

Selvia, et al. study (2017) used thought stopping technique to effectively reduce the bullying behavior of students in relation to the victims of bullying who suffered negative impacts. One of which was social anxiety. Wolpe (in Erford, 2016) explains that thought stopping trains clients to get rid of any unwanted thoughts as early as possible, usually by calling the "stop" command to interrupt unwanted thoughts.

Thus, the technique of thought stopping can help the unproductive control of a person or the loss of thoughts and images of one self by suppressing or eliminating these negative awareness by giving instructions to oneself to stop the negative flow of thought through the presence of shocking stimuli or stimuli. As a result, the situation or feeling of anxiety in a social situation can be overcome.

The results of this study conclude that group counseling services with systematic desensitization technique and group counseling services with thought stopping technique can help students to reduce social anxiety and can be used to help the teachers of guidance and counseling in dealing with students' social anxiety, especially in SMA Negeri 12 Semarang.

## CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to see the effectiveness of group counseling with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques to reduce social anxiety in the students of SMA N 12 Semarang. The results of the study show that group counseling with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques are effective in reducing social anxiety. Further, there is a difference in effectiveness between group counselling service with systematic desensitization technique, group counselling service with thought stopping as well as the combination of systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques. The results show that the group counselling with the combination of systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques is more effective than interventions in the form of one technique. Furthermore, the use of heterogeneous service

targets is suggested to be able to prove the effectiveness of group counseling service with systematic desensitization and thought stopping techniques for wider results.

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